FAITH and My Friends

Marcus Bach

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By MARCUS BACH

They Have Found a Faith
Report to Protestants
Dream Gate

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By MARCUS BACH

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First Edition

To

Dorothy

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FAITH AND MY FRIENDS

CHAPTER I

THE RIGHT TO BELIEVE

During a lecture tour on the west coast, I took part in a radio broadcast emanating from the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. With me on this "Top-of-the-Mark" program was a recording artist whose songs have made her one of America's most popular entertainers. She was in town with a dance band; I was giving a series of talks in a downtown church. As we sat around the table for a brief rehearsal before going on the air, the mistress of ceremonies looked up from her scribbled notes and asked, "By the way, Mr. Bach, what are you going to talk about?"

"Well," I said, "my field is religious research."

"I know. But what does that mean? Just what do you do?"

"I've been exploring the trails of faith in America," I explained, "getting a better appreciation of how much we value our freedom of worship. My special interest is in the lesser-known religions and in the people who worship off the beaten path."

"What do you mean, 'lesser-known'?"

"Groups not generally included in the traditional denominations. Of course, the term is relative. For example, the Mormons may be little known in the Midwest but they are certainly well known in Utah and in other Western states. And although the West and the Midwest may not know much about Vedanta, the movement is a growing one on our two seaboards. I try to analyze and interpret America's many lesser-known religions in an attempt to find out what they believe, how they they live and what can be learned from them. The idea is to put myself in the place of the other fellow, in order to understand his point of view and the faith he lives by."

Unexpectedly, the singing star spoke up. "You mean you really do that?"

When I asssured her that I had been carrying on this research for almost fifteen years, she said, "I'm interested. Everyone seems to be on something of a religious quest these days, and I'll be frank in saying that I am, too. There come times in life when the careers we have, the security we enjoy, and even our friends can't help us over life's rough spots. We need a philosophy—something to tie to."

Just then we were given the signal to go on the air, and for the better part of the allotted thirty minutes, the subject of discussion was the very real search for God that is going on in American life.

After the broadcast I said to the celebrity, "Where do you think you will find the answer to your search?"

"I've found it," she replied. "At the present time I'm taking instruction in the Catholic Church."

A few months later I dropped in on a Father Divine meeting in Harlem. It was held in a big, barnlike place on 155th Street, just off Eighth Avenue. Following the rousing service, free lunch was served, and I was handed a stack of waffles and a steaming cup of coffee.

"Sit down here," invited a Negro whose physical bigness justified the plateful of hot dogs before him on the small table. "It's all on the Lord."

I sat down next to him and together we enjoyed the much-publicized "luxury of abundance" of the Divine commissary.

"Been driving a truck all day," said the Negro, apologizing for his soiled work clothes. "Came just as I was."

"Are you a member here?" I asked.

"No, I'm not," he answered. "I think Father's doing a good work, but I don't believe in his deification."

I looked at him with interest. The longer we talked the more I became aware of a strange contradiction between the quality of his appearance and the quality of his mind.

"By the way," he said seriously, "can you tell me anything about the ontological views of the Catholics as compared with the Protestants?"

I was just recovering from the question—and from my attempt at an answer—when he inquired steadfastly, "You know anything about the Ontological Society?"

I explained the little I knew about the organization.

He said, "How is it related to ethical culture? You think the moral law can prove that God is good?"

"Where have you been driving that truck?" I asked smiling. "Around a theological seminary?"

"I'm a floater," he said reflectively. "I've been going to this church and that. For a while I was a Jehovah's Witness. That taught me to read the Scriptures. Then I got interested in New Thought and Theosophy. I started taking the Rosicrucian course one time, and at present I lean a little toward Psychiana. Just looking around for the something I need."

As far as I was concerned, my Top-of-the-Mark experience and this incident in Harlem substantiated what I had found across the nation: people everywhere were looking for a faith. They were seeking practical plans for living which would satisfy both spirit and mind. They were responding to ideas which reached out beyond morality into spirituality and to thoughts that were greater than their own.

This was an active and almost universal quest. It was not proved by statistics; less than half of our population belonged to a church. It was not expressed in church attendance; less than half of those belonging to a church attended the services. It was not borne out by any high-powered religious revival or sensationalized crusade. The adventure of faith was to be found in individual lives. This fact stood out sharply above the confusion of a divided world. Quietly, earnestly, systematically across the far stretches of our great land men and women were "looking for God." Religion was a mountain to be climbed, a sea to be crossed, a cave to be explored. It was also a life to be lived if one could find the way.

It was the *way* that interested me; rather, the *ways,* and most of all the people themselves, for true religion can always be discovered and understood best in terms of those who have found a faith. I had tracked down the stories and experiences of many of these seekers. As long as I could remember I had been interested in those who, either in the role of fisherman or philosopher, claimed to have heard the magic and compelling words, "Come, follow me." Permanent states of inspiration, a new morality had been their rewards; success in place of failure, health instead of sickness, riches for poverty had come to many of them.

I wanted to know how these people had found the path to self-realization and unquestioning trust in a Power that is real. Sometimes I had to admit that the stranger their practices, the greater was their appeal to me; the more exacting their demands, the stronger their authority. Whenever anyone laid claim to miracles or extraordinary revelations, he could always depend on my special attention.

I canvassed the nation to find people whose lives had been changed by religion. I interviewed them and was fascinated by their stories. Here were men and women preserving for our world a living contact with the essence of faith. I felt I understood them all, from the lovely old lady whose new-found belief made it sinful for her to thread a needle on the Sabbath to the pleasantly bombastic gentleman whose conversion had convinced him that he could play a round of Sunday golf and thereby praise the Lord. I lent a sympathetic ear even to those with whom I was in fundamental disagreement as long as it brought me nearer to the ideal of understanding the infinite Something which they had found.

It was clear to me that at a given moment, under the proper impulse and circumstance, by virtue of a sincere process of seeking, people got hold of convictions which transformed their lives and incarnated them with a new and living spirit. This entrance into the kingdom of faith would ever have to be through many doors and upward along many paths, for religion could never be divorced from either its own cultural origin or the cultural capacities of those who claimed it.

From time to time I recorded my impressions: There is one God; He is known by many names. There is one faith; it is lived in many beliefs. There is one truth; it is seen through many minds. There is one worship; it is expressed in many forms.

These were by no means popular conclusions. The idea behind my searching had always been, "All roads that lead to God are good." This was being construed by others as the creed of a man who believed everything and nothing, who saw goodness in evil and evil in good, and whose knowledge was empirical while his generalizations were unwarranted. The theory I secretly cherished, "All religions are segmental," gave others the impression that all churches, being equally true, could also be rated as equally false.

Were I to concede to every man the right to find God according to his own inclination, logical reasoning told me that there could be no such thing as heresy. If I contended that it did not matter what a man believed so long as he was sincere, would I not be justifying the most culpable pseudo prophet and condoning the most fantastic mock-messiah? And to say that in matters of religion everyone is right would not be saying what I honestly believed. Religion was a life to be lived if one could find the way.

I was not the only one who wanted the answers. Most of my friends were in the market for help along this line. Many of them took the institutionalized churches for granted and the contemporary religious groups as psychological phenomena. The first all too frequently failed to challenge their deepest loyalties, the second too often aroused their suspicions. Of theology they were ready to say, "I have only a small flickering light to guide me in the darkness of a thick forest and along comes a theologian and blows it out."

Weary of a symbolism of language out of which the meaning had gone, confused by dogmatic conclusions which for years had torn asunder the Protestant family, disheartened by the schisms in Christianity and by the nebulous notions of religion's function in a troubled world, they broke with the religion of their birth, went "cult hunting" in both fashionable temples and store-window churches or shopped for a time in psychology and psychoanalysis for something to believe.

Were they looking for a realm of absolute truth? Not exactly. Were they interested in people who had all the answers? Not so much as they were in people who had the courage to live the life. Intellectualism they admired, but they were willing to let intellect bow to intuition and dogma to experience. They were tired of fraud and self-deception. They despised religion as a ruse. They wanted spiritual honesty and uprightness even though they had no aspiration to become saints. They were looking for "truth," and they were prepared to go wherever truth could be found. It did not matter to them whether truth's abode was socially recognized or ecclesiastically endorsed by convention, culture or creed.

A new impulse was rising and it could no longer be ignored; there was the compulsive urge on the part of earnest, thoughtful people to find a philosophy that worked and a religion to which they could dedicate their innermost loyalties and ideals.

Meantime an amazing thing was happening. As I looked back over my role of religious adventurer and itinerant, I realized that many of my friends had gone ahead of me, not merely as spectators, but as open converts to groups beyond the limits of the commonly accepted Christian movements. Some of them wrote to me, telling me what they had found. Others dropped mysteriously out of my circle.

I also discovered that in my wandering to and fro across the highways and footpaths of America's religious terrain, I was continually encountering people who were demonstrating their freedom to search by living in unique and little-known religious societies.

Stranger than characters out of fiction some of these friends seemed to me. More fantastic than tales out of the past were their experiences. As rich as stories from Scripture were their accounts of spiritual search and discovery. These were people I knew. Their quests were real, their reports authentic, their goals had been reached.

What better assignment could there be for me than to familiarize myself with the lives my friends now lived, the faiths they had found and the beliefs they had embraced? Why not go back over my association with them and trace the development of their new loyalties and the reasons for their allegiance? This was adventure in the field of my deepest interest.

Once more, by choice and circumstance, I decided to set out on an excursion to explore the hidden sources of vigor in religion and to learn how the divine fire was kindled or rekindled in the hearts of modern Americans. I would try to observe in action the convictions men live by: little-known, strange convictions about which I had many preconceived ideas and unfounded notions. Now I would try to see them honestly and without prejudice through the believing eyes of friends. If, for a while, their truth could be made mine, then their religious discoveries might also contribute to my own seeking.

What was Vedanta and to whom did it appeal? Who were the Trappists and why were their monasteries growing throughout our land? How did the Hutterians live and worship in their isolated communes? How strange were the practices of the inaccessible Penitentes? Was it possible to understand the mystical Swedenborgians? What went on behind the scenes in the increasingly prominent and significant work of the Mormon faith?

Alluring incense from altars new and old beckoned. Tantalizing curtains would soon be lifted. For the spiritual adventurer religion might be a mountain to be climbed, a sea to be crossed, a cave to be explored, but it was just as surely a life to be lived. And so I set forth, following the faith of my friends, wondering how I would be received and whether I, too, would find the way.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAPPIST

On a day in early fall, twenty years ago, I said good-by to George Calmer. He turned from me to put his arms around his mother. Then he shook hands with his dad and said so that I could hear, "Always remember, it is hard to live as a Trappist, but it is easy to die as one."

The train took George out of my sight, and time took him out of my memory for twenty years. His motives remained a mystery. His words of farewell were lost in the pages of the town's chronicles. Twenty years and then, one day, I, too, boarded a train to a Trappist monastery. I wanted to find George and get his story.

It was the day before Thanksgiving. A typical holiday crowd packed the coaches on the one-a-day local from Louisville to Nashville. Hilarious college students were wisecracking across the crowded aisles. Tired commuters were complaining. Their seats were being usurped; their train was several hours late. Maneuvered by the homegoers to the end of the coach, I sat perched on my suitcase. Resolutely I opened a book never sold by a news-vendor on any line: *The Rule of St. Benedict.* This was my preparation for Trappist life, a condensation of seventy-three chapters written in A.D. 500 when "civilization appeared to be on the very verge of extinction." From his cave in the solitudes of Subiaco, Italy, the father of monastic orders was, in *The Rule,* urging men to flee the world and appease the wrath of an angry God.

"Bardstown Junction! All out for Limestone Springs, Clermont, Lotus, Deatsville!"

Impatient passengers extricated their bags from the jangled canopy of luggage and made their way toward the doors. Benedict's advice on how to live was nearly jockeyed out of my hands. The saint's suggestion to withdraw from the world seemed completely appropriate.

For two hours, while the train rumbled on, St. Benedict's philosophy advised me that a man of God should talk little, laugh never and give up every form of pleasure always. Through eleven station stops I fluctuated between the monastic life and a coachful of howling homegoers. In spite of personal sympathies, the outlook for the good saint was gloomy.

Then the conductor's call cut through the coach with a sudden antiquarian ring: "Gethsemani! All out for Gethsemani!"

The words had a quieting effect. No crowded aisles now. No shoving rush of passengers. No one wanted to get off here. Alone I made my way to the door while the other travelers gazed out soberly upon the lonely station. With a timelessness that was like the hovering calm of the hazy afternoon, the depot stood passively resistant to the frenzied world.

I stepped to the platform. An old horse and buggy were drawn up near the panting locomotive. Near by was the custodian of this outmoded rig, hugging the folds of a brown woolen habit about his frail body, hands hidden in wide, loose sleeves. His bearded face was framed within the brown cowl pulled over his head. A wide, black leather belt was pulled tightly around his thin waist. He might have been one whom Benedict had summoned from the ruins of an ancient grotto.

The depot agent handed him a small express package and a large mail sack, limp with emptiness. These he dropped into the buggy as I walked over.

"Pardon me," I said, "are you a Trappist?"

He nodded and his solemn, impersonal glance learned all he wanted to know about me.

I introduced myself and asked, "Are you going to the monastery? I have made arrangements with the Father Abbot for a retreat."

With courteous indifference he motioned me into the seat. Cautiously he placed his foot on the buggy lift, pulled himself up and dropped into the driver's place. Hunching forward, he snapped the reins over the aging horse and we started off.

"Do you meet the train every day?" I inquired.

He shrugged, preoccupied.

"Very late today," I went on. "Lots of folks going home."

There was no response. The monk's expressionless eyes were fixed on the road, his lips set resolutely in his beard.

I tried again. "How far is it to Our Lady of Gethsemani?"

The reins rattled patiently.

Then I suddenly remembered that the Trappist monk never speaks. Benedict himself had ordered, "Because of the importance of silence, let leave to speak be given not even to perfect disciples."

I had this to occupy my thoughts while wondering what occupied my friend's as the buggy wheels squeaked and the horse plodded over the lonely black-top road leading through the rolling stretches of Nelson County. There were no farmhouses and no signs of life for nearly two miles. The pastures were deserted, the fields desolate, the earth as somber as my companion. Then as we slowly climbed the crest of a knoll, a glistening church spire rose sharply to spear the heavens.

"Our Lady of Gethsemani?" I asked impulsively.

The monk nodded.

A stone wall stretched across the barren prairie like a defiant barrier against my intrusion. Benedict's rule had evidently been carried to its ultimate fulfillment. The wall was about ten feet high and was made of rough cement blocks fitted into close sections between strong pilasters. Now the road turned and we followed the wall in a parallel line to a narrow lane flanked by double rows of leafless trees. We were heading toward the forbidding entrance set between two pointed stone columns. The wide Gothic arch joining the columns was surmounted by a cross; in a niche below the cross stood a statue of the Holy Mother and Child. Across the archway bold letters spelled the greeting: *Pax Entratibus.*

The monk drew up rein, motioned me down and with a gesture reminded me not to forget my suitcase. Offering no advice on how I might get into this impenetrable fortress, he drove away along the wall.

In the right door was a small iron grill guarding a wooden slide. I tried to push it aside, but it was securely fastened. I raised my hand to knock, but my attention was arrested by a crude cross dangling on a rusty wire. This unique bell pull, fashioned out of an old ax handle, was a graphic symbol of the life Benedict had prescribed: work and worship, toil and triumph, labor and love. These were the terms on which the promise of "Peace to all who enter here" was fulfilled. I gave the cross a hopeful pull and a soft bell sounded inside the wall. Then I heard heavy, halting steps. The wooden slide behind the grill moved back. A grizzled, hooded face peered through.

"Yes?" he asked curtly.

I pushed my letter from the Father Prior through the narrow aperture.

"Wait here," said the Gatekeeper, closing the wooden slide.

Moments passed. The shuffling steps returned, accompanied by a rattle of keys. The lock shot back with a sudden clang and the door opened stingily. I stepped inside and found myself in a narrow passageway formed by the walls of two sturdily built gatehouses. The heavy door jarred shut behind me, the lock clacked into place. Before me lay the abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani like a scene torn from some forgotten page of medieval history.

In a single step I had gone back a thousand years. The Mother Church had caught and perpetuated the spiritual essence and a physical landscape of the Middle Ages. A huge, three-storied, green-shuttered quadrangle with a towering cross dominated the carefully tended grounds. On a stone pedestal encircled by a pathway leading to the building was a life-size alabaster statue of the Virgin. Two white-robed monks walked silently in attitudes of prayer, cowls pulled low over their heads. Brown-clad monks, half-hidden by the shrubbery, worked with garden tools preparing the earth for quiet resignment to the insistent call of approaching winter.

The Gatekeeper opened a door in the stone wall on my left. "Wait here," he ordered.

I entered the dark and cheerless gatehouse. The dull light of late afternoon filtered through the dingy, small-paned window. The chair and the wooden bench were dusty. The glass showcase with its rosaries, books and postcards seemed never to have been disturbed by inquisitive hands. How many times had the last glow of day touched the lonely crucifix on the barren wall? How many times had an intruder stood here and felt himself confronted by the mystery of self-sacrifice? The Benedictines, the Cistercians, the Reformed Cistercians of La Trappe in northern France from which the Trappists got their name—were they symbols of modern worship or relics of a superstitious past?

As if in answer to my question, the door opened, admitting a tall, hearty man of late middle age. His face beneath the white cowl was ruddy with health. His shoulders were broad and strong. His loose-fitting white habit, covered over with a black scapular, was gathered snugly around his rotund body by a black leather belt.

"Well!" he exclaimed with a chuckle. "How was the trip?"

Before I could answer he continued genially, "Are you hungry? Of course, you must be. Which reminds me, we are now in the great fast!"

He picked up my suitcase energetically.

"I am the Father Guestmaster," he tendered. "That is why I have permission to talk—" his mild blue eyes glinted mischievously—"only I talk too much."

Pausing possessively in the corridored passage, he asked, "How do you like Our Lady of Gethsemani?"

Personal pride carried him on. "We have been here nearly a hundred years. When the first brothers came from France it was not as it is now. They made the fifteen miles from Bardstown in an oxcart. Those early times were filled with hard struggles and trials for the poor Trappists. But, you know, the greater the suffering, the greater the glory."

"How long have you been here, Father Guestmaster?"

"I?" His voice was buoyant. "It seems like only a few days. Come to think of it, though, I was a young man when I came here from Germany. But time with God is not measured as time is in the world."

"Do many from other countries come here to join the order?"

"Most are Americans, but there are also French, Irish, Mexican—in all, fourteen nationalities in our community of nearly a hundred. But we have no difficulty understanding one another. There is one language we can all speak—silence."

We crossed the grounds and I followed him into a long, vaulted corridor. When we passed a statue of Christ, the Guestmaster pushed back his cowl, revealing the Trappist tonsure, a narrow fringe of hair like a halo encircling his closely shaven head.

"I take you to the Father Prior," he explained, pausing before a heavy door. "He will tell you what to do. It is good a man has someone to tell him what to do. Without that, life would be very confusing."

He opened the door with finality and we entered the business office of Our Lady of Gethsemani.

From across a table covered with letters and papers the quiet, penetrating eyes of a middle-aged monk met mine. He greeted me with the crisp, authoritative voice of an executive, but his halo tonsure, his white robe and black scapular, his thin ascetic face subdued all evidences of contact with "the world." Without rising, he motioned me to a straight-backed chair. The Father Guestmaster tucked his hands into the generous recesses of his sleeves and stood obediently.

"I am the Father Prior," the Superior said curtly. "In the absence of the Father Abbot I welcome you. How long do you propose to remain with us?"

"Two weeks, if I may."

A quick smile crossed the Prior's lips and he glanced from me to the Guestmaster. Then he admonished, "You know we observe strict silence here and ask you to do the same. You may, of course, converse with the Father Guestmaster. There will also be Brother Joseph who will care for you while you are a guest."

With these terse injunctions he consigned me to the custody of the Guestmaster who picked up my suitcase and abruptly led me out.

We turned down a long hallway. Except for the statuary the building might have been a deserted dormitory.

"Do the brothers occupy all these rooms?"

My ignorance amused him.

"We do not have private rooms." He chuckled. "Only when there are large retreats or when there are great observances are these rooms used. Just now you are the only retreatant."

His words ended in a labored sigh, for we were ascending a darkening stairway. On the third floor he paused before a door and warned, "This is not a room in one of your city hotels. But this I assure you, it will be quiet."

It was. Silence hung in the stale, closeted air of the six-by-ten cubicle, meagerly furnished with a cot, a small table and a chair.

Only the inevitable crucifix hanging darkly on the wall suggested that the room had ever been lived in. The Guestmaster lighted a gas jet over the table and the bluish-yellow glow struggled against the lifeless atmosphere.

"Father Guestmaster," I ventured, "I once knew a boy who became a Trappist. I came down here to——"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted patiently and dismissed my hopeful query with "It seems that everyone has a friend who has taken the vows. Well, when the bell rings soon now, you go down the hall, straight ahead to the door at the end. There Brother Joseph will take care of you."

He gave me a reassuring glance and walked thoughtfully from the room.

Through my window I could see the retaining wall, rust-stained and aged. The shadows in the corridor entrance were deepening. The gates were locked in their stark archway. Why? To keep the world out or to keep the monks in? What compensation could a man find to take up this Trappist imprisonment willingly?

The monastery bell rang with authority. Through the lonely, silent hall, dimly lighted by a gas jet, I made my way to the guest dining room. The brown-robed monk who waited there to serve me was so gentle, so strangely tender and prophetic that I thought I had seen him many times before. In the pages of *The Rule* and through the golden legends of the saints he must have walked. His thin shoulders were stooped as if by years of unremitting labor and humility. When I entered he was bent over an ancient sideboard pouring milk from a pitcher into a glass. His brown-bearded, sallow face was soft in the lamplight.

"Brother Joseph?"

He nodded and in a low voice warm with welcome said, "Everything is ready."

The round antique table held a bountiful country supper: ham and eggs, fried potatoes, cheese, beans, beets, black bread, butter, jam, honey and fruit.

I bowed my head over this abundance while Brother Joseph unobtrusively made the sign of the cross. A faint smile lighted up his soft, moist eyes when I remarked that the dinner was excellent.

"Hunger seasons all food well," he said, and added thoughtfully, "Sometimes I think our bread is all a person needs."

The moist generous slices of Trappist bread were the memorable portion of my first monastery meal. With or without butter, the bread was delicious. But Brother Joseph was saying, "It is another Bread that keeps us alive. When a man has tasted of that, he will never die."

"Do you prepare all these things here?" I asked.

"They are sent from the kitchen downstairs."

"The monks eat downstairs?"

"In a common refectory. You will see."

"And what do you eat, Brother Joseph?"

He shrugged as if to assure me that food was unimportant.

"The Father Guestmaster told me this was the time of the great fast," I said.

My host stood by in servile grace saying nothing, but his smile prompted me to say, "Brother Joseph, wouldn't you like to reach over and take a piece of this wonderful ham?"

"There is no temptation," he said in a hushed voice. "While nothing human is foreign to us, the joy of the Master is stronger."

"How long have you been in Our Lady of Gethsemani?"

"Some thirty years."

"Are you glad for an opportunity to speak?"

He shook his head. "The greater the silence, the nearer is God."

"Brother Joseph, I knew a boy twenty years ago who became a Trappist. His name was George Calmer."

"Names," he said softly, "are given up with other things of the world."

I looked at him. He turned away slowly, walked to the sideboard. There he stood a moment in thought, then turned and our eyes met.

"Eat," he said quietly. "Is there anything I may bring you?"

From the narrow rim of hair to his heavy, homemade shoes, he was a figure indifferent to the rush and meaning of modern life. Out of the past he had come and out of forgotten pages he spoke: "Here we are all alike. There is only One whom we seek, and perhaps there is really only One whom you seek, too?"

When the meal was ended he reverently made the sign of the cross and his lips moved in an unspoken prayer.

I walked to my room feeling that I had passed many times through the long and gloomy corridors, feeling that I had often listened vainly for sounds in these silences. When I put my hand on the doorknob something restrained me. I felt there was someone waiting for me inside the room. I went in. The gas jet burned listlessly. The room was chill. Night had thrust its starless vesture over Our Lady of Gethsemani.

Then I noticed that a piece of paper lay on the table, a printed sheet captioned: "RULES FOR ORDINARY DAYS IN WINTER (September 14th to Easter)." This is what it said:

2:00 A.M.	Rising: Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary
2:30 A.M.	Mental Prayer
3:00 A.M.	MATINS & LAUDS, Angelus, Private Masses, Interval
5:30 A.M.	PRIME, Chapter, Arranging Couches, Frustulum, Interval
7:45 A.M.	TIERCE, High Mass, SEXT, Work
10:45 A.M.	End of Work
11:07 A.M.	NONE, Particular Examen, Angelus
11:30 A.M.	Dinner, Grace, Interval
1:30 P.M.	Work
3:30 P.M.	End of Work, Interval
4:30 P.M.	VESPERS, Mental Prayer, Collation, Interval
6:10 P.M.	Public Reading, COMPLINE, Angelus
7:00 P.M.	Retiring

I was startled out of the deep fascination of this schedule by the opening door. The white-robed form moved in.

"Only the Father Guestmaster," he said genially. "Yes, I left you the plan for a day in the life of a Trappist. You think you can do it?"

"You get up at two o'clock?" I began.

"That is only for weekdays," he explained. "On Sundays and holy days it is different."

"Oh, then you can sleep?"

"Then we get up at *one-thirty*. But I do not expect you to conform to this. It is only to help you know what is going on."

The sound of distant chanting impressively dislodged a growing resistance to the rules.

"There," said the Guestmaster with feeling. "That is Compline. Let us go."

He turned down the gas jet until it was a matchlike flame. Then, a shadow in the darkening room, he said with gentle feeling, "It is at Compline that we sing *Salve Regina.* You will never forget the *Salve.* It is the most beautiful of all the offices.

"Once I was sick," he continued, leading me in the direction of the singing. "I was so sick I thought it was the end of the Father Guestmaster. It seemed to me that I would never again get up. Then it was time for Compline. A man gets so he lives his life with the canonical hours. He does not need a clock to tell the time. The hours are in here." He touched his breast. "Something inside me said, 'Get up, Father Guestmaster. Why do you lie there?' And all of a sudden I was on my feet and the next minute I was on my way to the church. I could have taken all the medicine in the world, but there was only one medicine I needed. At the singing of the *Salve* all my foolish pains went away."

We were now on the second floor and at the end of the dark hall near a door admitting to a narrow gallery extending across the back of the abbey church. There the Father Guestmaster left me and I entered to look down on the bowed heads of the monastic community. Facing one another across an aisle, a white stone aisle that led from below me to the sanctuary, the choir religious knelt in two long, parallel rows of high-backed prayer stalls. Also below me were four white altars, outlining a square in the center of which was a large statue of the Madonna. I saw the Guestmaster move unobtrusively into his place with the priests, their identities lost in the resplendence of the white robes. Large hymnals with silver clasps lay open on the carved wooden lecterns before the stalls. All was exalted in the huge sanctuary altar which lifted a majestic statue of the Christ against a lofty stained-glass window.

Now officiating Trappists, in mantles more lovely than any the Nazarene ever wore, entered the sanctuary. Every moment and every effect held a compelling interest. Through genuflexion and self-abasing responses the ritual was enacted with dramatic sincerity. A plaintive organ melody crept into the stillness, and a voice untrained but charged with spiritual intensity intoned: *"Salve Regina, Mater Misericordae . . ."*

Slowly priests and brothers took up the chant and soon the immense thicknesses of the walls seemed to echo the sound: "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope." Lowly, fervent men submissively sent the discordant chant triumphantly through the cavernous arches. "To thee do we cry, poor, banished children of Eve. To thee do we lift up our hearts, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears."

I leaned impulsively over the balcony rail. Where would I find George Calmer? How would I remember him? I could no longer distinguish Brother Joseph and the Father Guestmaster. The nameless children of the Mother Church blended in a oneness of spirit and intention, raising a single voice in their favorite antiphon, "Turn then, Most Gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed Fruit of Thy Womb, Jesus! O Clement! O Loving! O Sweet Virgin!"

Long after the chant ended and the lights went out in the abbey church, I still knelt with my arms on the balcony rail looking down as the phantomlike monks remained entranced by the aftermath of their hymn of adoration. I watched them return from their spiritual flights, rise from their knees and move to an exit at the front of the nave. There a white-clad priest, like an angel of mercy, raised his hands over each bowed head. Then the monks lifted their cowls and disappeared with palms pressed fervently together. I stayed until the last one had gone. The sanctuary lamp, deep and crimson, was the perpetual reminder of the Presence for which these lonely pilgrims of the lowly way had yearned.

The sound of my steps was loud in the hall as I went to my room. It seemed very late, but when I looked at my watch under the gas jet, it was only seven. Without undressing I lay down on the cot and looked up at the ceiling where the gas light twisted its shadows and figures and wrote its mysteries. My thoughts always came back to an unalterable truth. This was America. This was one of America's strange altars. The monks were men like myself. Yet unlike anything I could ever be.

On this first night I envied and feared them. They had found something to which they could give complete and unquestioning loyalty and submission, but their unspoken thoughts and their willing and insular commitment to the Unseen were frightening. The buoyant Guestmaster, the obsequious Joseph, the stern Father Prior and the somber Gatekeeper, all of the varied and holy bondsmen of Our Lady of Gethsemani had been enacting the beauty of the *Salve* for a hundred years away from the eyes of men. Within these walls for thousands of days and nights, men fasted and prayed and mortified their bodies with a total disdain for attention or praise. Here they kept their everlasting vows of silence and renunciation while the progress and pleasure of the world went by unheeded. Their life was a mystery and an anachronism. I concluded that the order could not last. It could not perpetuate itself. Not in America.

Somewhere in the hollow recesses of the building a door whined on its hinges. In the ominous interval that followed I listened hopefully for sounds. There was only silence; a silence that seemed to belong; shadows that had their place. Then somewhere in the vast and limitless freedom that was the world, I heard the sound of an aeroplane and I held my breath to listen to its drone as it ebbed and flowed in and out of hearing, and then was gone. I prepared for sleep in the disturbing and gentle quiet of a monastery night.

The room was dark and cold when the clangor of a bell woke me at an early hour. Somewhere in the building was the shuffling sound of heavy shoes. Creaking stairs recorded a procession. It was two o'clock. The call to morning watch, prescribed by *The Rule,* was being dramatized. Tired bodies, properly disciplined, had awakened obediently. Holy monks, despising the luxury of sleep, were going to the abbey church to find God before the dawn. In a moment a supplicating *Invitatorium* crept into my room. On the hushed wings of this solemn hour the chant was beautiful and beckoning. I dressed quickly and made my way through the shadowed halls to begin a Trappist day.

The service was not much different from Compline which had closed the day only a few hours before. Again I saw the prostrated forms, the genuflexions, and the indescribable abnegation of inordinately disciplined men who were determined to immortalize these practices. Most of them were young men. At least a third of the community was less than thirty years of age.

Again I instinctively scanned the hooded faces for a friend whom I had known, but just now any story he might have to tell seemed unimportant. It did not matter whether I believed in the practices of these men or whether I understood the greater meaning behind their pursuits; there was something about their devotion that brought a feeling of nearness to the Object of their adoration. The "Morning Star Jesus," about whom they sang, rose in splendor in the abbey church and became the focal point of human searching. Then Lauds prostrated the worshipers under its mystical spell. The brown and white garments were tranquilized into sculptured forms.

I knelt engulfed in thought as eyes were raised to the ornate Corpus above the sanctuary altar. After a long silence the hypnotic ringing of the Angelus called priests and acolytes to officiate at the altars in the outer chapel for private masses. For another thirty minutes holy incantations mingled with the redolence from the altars. The world was continually pushed back and made increasingly unimportant. The full choir of ardent voices assured me that this was the way to begin a day. God could best be found in these early offices. Slowly, reluctantly the gray light of dawn lifted the overcast curtains outside the long windows. Quietly the men below me prayed, "O Lord God, King of Heaven and Earth, vouchsafe this day to direct and sanctify, to rule and govern our hearts and bodies, our thoughts, words and deeds. . . ."

My Protestant knees were stiff from four long hours with these prisoners of the abbey. While they retired to the chapter room to receive counsel from the Father Prior, I went to breakfast.

Brother Joseph stood at the sideboard as if some sixth sense had forewarned him of the exact moment of my coming. In his timeless way he motioned me to my place and set before me a steaming bowl of cereal and a pitcher of thick cream. Within easy reach was Trappist bread, jam, honey, fruit, butter and milk.

I started to eat. Brother Joseph stood at the window looking out. After a long moment he spoke.

"It will rain today," he said. "It always rains when the frost is white on the mill roof as it is this morning. I remember . . ." Then he paused, seeming to feel my eager interest. After a lingering, quiet gaze he let the curtain fall back. Gently he asked, "Would you like your coffee now?"

He brought me a generous serving of bacon and eggs.

"What will you have for breakfast, Brother Joseph?"

He shook his head.

"Nothing?"

He smiled. "Frustulum," he said, very matter of fact. "That is about two ounces of bread and a cup of water. Frustulum means a small portion. But it is observed only during the great fast."

"I know," I told him. "Only from September fourteenth to Easter!"

"You know," he said in a voice that was low and confiding, "it is hard to live as a Trappist, but it is easy to die as one."

I looked at him intently. I was standing again on a depot platform twenty years ago. George Calmer was shaking hands with his father and embracing his mother. I heard his words and his voice. But it was only a fantasy. Brother Joseph was too old. He was small and frail. There was no resemblance, no hint of similarity between him and the one I had known. Yet the haunting cry of my boyhood friend mingled with the voice of this lay brother and possessed me when I re-entered the church for the observance of Tierce. I stayed for the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass at which the bread and wine are "changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord." The staccato ringing of a bell is the sign. When the priest raises the chalice and drinks, the mystical union is consummated. "May Thy Body, O Lord, which I have received, and Thy Blood which I have drunk cleave to my heart. . . ."

Through the ritualistic precision of Postcommunion to the final prayers at the foot of the altar, the monks were caught in the throbbing power of this ancient ritual. Incense rose and scented the air. The candles burned enchantedly. The hour of Sext sealed the true object of monastic existence: through the act and sacrifice of the penitent, a mystical power was generated. Through continuous yearning and striving the monks intervened in the age-old feud between an angry God and sinful man. This was religion's mission ever since the world began and it was the Trappists' assignment every moment of every day. Almost six hours of this day had already been consumed by their mystical acts. They had eaten only "Frustulum," but now, fortified with the memory and meaning of the Sacrament, they were ready for manual labor.

I saw them from my monastery window. In the haunting morning light the Gatekeeper limped toward the enclosure wall to sit again at his post of duty. Other brown-clad brothers, hirelings of *The Rule,* moved across the grounds to resume their work. I was sure I had seen a hundred days start this very way before. And when the door of my room opened and the white-clad Guestmaster came in, there was a flash of memory telling me that this had all happened many times, long years ago. If not in Our Lady of Gethsemani, then in La Trappe, or even in a cave somewhere, sometime, not quite beyond my knowing.

"Well!" he greeted. "Did you enjoy the services? Did you have a good breakfast? How did you sleep?"

Divining the answers before I could reply, he went on: "You want to look over the grounds. Or maybe work with the brothers? We had a visitor here once. He said, 'Father Guestmaster, I had no idea that the monks worked as hard as they do. Why, you are really farmers.' He wanted to know if the members of the community came from farms. 'Maybe a few,' I told him. 'Maybe a few, but you would be surprised if you knew all the different kinds of men that are hidden beneath those cowls.' "

He chatted on, again inviting me to go out in the grounds. I replied by zipping up my leather jacket.

"What happened there?" he demanded, with a humorous glint in his mild eyes.

"That's a zipper, Father. Surely you've seen a zipper."

"What is it for?"

"In place of buttons."

"But why?"

"It saves time."

He shook his head. "Always something to save time," he said. "Tell me, what do people in the world do with all the time they save?"

Had I known the answer, he would not have been interested in hearing it. He had already opened the door and was leading me out.

"The bad thing in the world," he went on, "is that men are always making things to render life better, but life gets worse.

It is because they will not take time to strengthen their wills and elevate their characters. They think they are masters, but they are mastered by the life they have created. Once a man wanted to become a Trappist. He brought with him five smoking pipes. He told the Father Abbot he would taper off, smoke a little less every day. Some weeks later he said, 'Father Abbot, I think I have done it. I do not need the pipes any more.' 'Good,' said the Father Abbot. 'Let us have a ceremony.' So they went into the yard and burned the pipes. The next morning the man said, 'Father Abbot, all night I could not sleep. I must smoke or go crazy.' 'You will never be a Trappist,' said the Father Abbot. 'Go back home. Not all who are called are chosen, and sometimes the chains of the world are stronger than we can break.' "

He left me in the monastery yard and gave me permission to roam the grounds. This was significant. Protestant friends had told me that there were secret, guarded places, mysteries and hidden things. There were supposed to be areas where no one was allowed to go. A woman in Philadelphia, hearing that I planned to visit Gethsemani, had written to warn me that her brother had been a Trappist and had "escaped." "There is an old cistern," she said, "in which there has been one murder and two suicides!"

Wherever I went, I found silent brown-clad monks efficiently performing the work required in the operation of a three-thousand-acre farm. Idleness, the enemy of the soul, had been banished from the workshop of Our Lady of Gethsemani. Each man seemed to go his way intuitively. He never looked directly at another brother. He paid no attention to me. There was, however, a simple sign language which helped where co-operation was necessary. Very little of this was used, for each monk's duty was assigned to him in advance, season by season. That is why the superiors sometimes refer to the workers as "Brother Hive," "Brother Gardener" or "Brother Wood."

The Guestmaster was right—it would have been interesting to know the kind of men who plowed the field near the big barn, who herded the dairy cattle in the frostbitten pasture, who repaired the poultry houses and who worked on the wooded slope in the distance. Labor, Benedict had assured, is devotion, an aid to contemplation. Work is worship, he said, and when the dull tones of the Angelus reached out across the silent acres, the monks turned their faces toward the abbey church.

I went with them when they made their way to the chapel to recite the fifth canonical office, None, the hour when Jesus died on the cross. I tried to find George Calmer among the men who lingered in the prayer stalls for Angelus, the prayer recited in commemoration of the Annunciation. The more I watched and listened, the more intrusive I felt. These men were living the torture of the One Who had ascended the cross. In None I saw the apprehension of the sin of man which guided the monks to Golgotha. I felt the sincerity of purpose in the repeated cry of the Examen: "O God, come to my aid!" I saw the inner obedience to the outward ritual when the worshipers prayed, "Lord, make haste to help me!"

Reluctantly I followed them to the refectory at eleven-thirty for the first real meal of the day. Each monk dipped his fingers into a basin of water as he entered, reminding himself with what purity of spirit he should approach the worldly function that sustains the physical man. Plain board tables were set in a rectangle. At each place was a tin plate covered with a small white napkin bearing the monk's spiritual name. Near by were a cup, a brown tankard of water, a shaker of salt, a knife, fork and spoon. The Father Prior and the Subprior stood at the head of the table where a large crucifix hung on the drab wall. The Prior whispered a prayer. The men pulled homemade stools from beneath the table and sat down. The reader went to his lectern at the side wall. While two lay brothers served a frugal meal of barley soup and bread, he read from the Psalms: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. . . ."

The reading constantly reinforced the fact that spiritual food should be counted above bodily nourishment. Thanksgiving in Our Lady of Gethsemani had nothing to do with feasting, and the way in which the monks observed the Interval following the noonday meal was another phenomenon which belonged in my unresolved mysteries of Trappist life. To a worldling like me a free hour at midday meant siestatime. To them it was another opportunity for study and prayer. The offices strengthened the soul, but the Intervals, if properly employed, contented the spirit.

At one-thirty the monastery bell again summoned the lay brothers to work. As they left the sheltering walls of the cloister for the walled-in acres, the Guestmaster beckoned to me. "Come," he said, "I will show you the fields of labor for the choir religious."

He meant the men who were priests or who aspired to the priesthood. But he referred to both lay monks and choir religious when he explained: "Candidates are accepted between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five. There is first a thirty-day period of postulancy. Then a two-year novitiate. At the end of that time the candidate takes his preliminary vows and enters a three-year term of profession. He may now still go back to the world if he is not sufficiently fortified of the spirit."

"But after the final vows?"

"He stays."

"For life?"

"Why, of course."

"But what if he would want to leave after a number of years?"

"There is no one standing at the gate with a gun!" the Guestmaster exclaimed. "If a man wants to run away, let him try. It is not from the monastery that he is running, it is from himself. To run from oneself one must have a fast horse."

The young men I saw in the large *scriptorium* had no intention of running away so far as I could see. The dozen or more novices sat at low, slanting desks engrossed in study. Their preparation, comparable to required seminary training, equipped them for priesthood in the parish of seclusion. Their instructors were the Master of Novices and the Theological Doctors whose learning was deepened in the silences and whose search for wisdom was answered in one of the most treasured religious book collections in America.

The Guestmaster ushered me reverently into the library on the monastery second floor. Once more I was in another world. But for the crude, bare tables and the wooden chairs, this volume-studded room could have been the hideaway of an aristocratic bibliophile. The Guestmaster was delighted at my amazement as I looked at the colorful volumes that lined the walls from floor to ceiling. With pride of ownership he escorted me through the stacks.

"The repository of the sacred wisdom of Mother Church," he recited. "Everything anyone would want for a lifetime of reading and research. You just stay here awhile and look around."

I did. For two hours I visited with ancient manuals that held the precious secrets of the Cistercian order and the hallowed writings of Cistercian saints. Codices and folios, French tomes brought to Kentucky by the founders of Gethsemani, priceless incunabula, books of rare beauty in resplendent vellum and glossy leather, nearly a hundred thousand volumes serving men who never imparted their learning to the world. This soundless room might have been the monks' most cherished pleasure, linking them with the past and providing avenues of escape into time and space.

Into my silence broke the ringing of the monastery bell. I hurried out, hoping to mingle with the monks during the three-thirty Interval. But immediately they retreated to secret places of consecration. Again free time meant voluntary enslavement in the galleys of prayer. I walked the lonely paths across the monastery grounds. A cold drizzle was falling. Time hung heavy as the clouds. Was it just this morning that Brother Joseph had said, "It will rain today?" It seemed an eternity. The Guestmaster was right—time with God was not measured as time is measured in the world. Could men find something so real and compensating that they would willingly embrace this life? Or did they come here with youthful enthusiasm, as George Calmer had done, only to be caught and held by some force against which they feared to struggle? Was it fanaticism or faith?

I walked thoughtfully through the mistlike rain to the abbey cemetery. Sheltering evergreens bent low over the well-tended graves. Each lonely mound was marked by a small iron cross. A hundred or more of these cautiously set markers immortalized the impalpable text: "It is hard to live as a Trappist, but it is easy to die as one." Then I looked for something. I looked for evidence of a warning that a Protestant friend had given me. "The Trappists," he had insisted, "never pass one another without whispering *Memento Mori*—'remember, we must die.' And he digs his own grave by grubbing out a handful of dirt every day."

There was no proof of this. The cold, wet ground had only a symbolic meaning. I found only a parable. Throughout the daily offices and Intervals the monks dig into their souls, continually grubbing out the earthiness which is part of the nature of man. Nowhere had I heard anyone say, *"Memento Mori,"* but the unspoken words reverberated through the silent hours and haunted the lonely resting place where I stood. And walking between the graves I read: Father Pius, Father Bernard, Father Joseph, Brother Andrew, Brother Boniface. In death, as in life, worldly identity was lost. If my friend had died, who would be able to find his grave? And why?

A squeaking wheelbarrow was being pushed over the grounds by a lay brother. He passed quite close to me, a hooded, halting shadow, stooped abjectly, shuffling as he walked. Rain dripped from his brown hood. He did not look my way. I watched. I wanted to call to him. There was something about his walk and his appearance that made me wonder if this might be the boy I had known. He continued on his way. I lifted my eyes thoughtfully into the distance. As I did so I became aware that a wide vista broke free and unobscured straight into the horizon. The wall had stopped. Across barren fields and uninhabited spaces, freedom's cloister led out into the world.

"The wall does not enclose everything!" I said aloud.

There was a voice near me. The smiling Father Guestmaster was at my side.

"Why, no!" he said with a laugh. "What made you think it did?"

I stood within the Trappist mystery. These men were indeed prisoners by choice and not compulsion. They were where they wanted to be and there was nothing to hold them but the everlasting bonds of their faith. In the monastery yard other brown-cowled monks were on their way to do their chores. Some were hurrying so that they would be sure not to miss Vespers, the sixth office, the benedictory on labor.

Vespers was the tributary of pre-Christian faith flowing into the swelling stream of Mother Church. The hymnody, with its allusions to paganism and ancient miracles and sacrifices, united monasticism to Hebrew history and tradition. According to the world, Vespers should have been hurried, for it led to the supper hour. According to custom it was the most deliberate of the offices and was followed by an Interval for prayer.

I saw the monks go to supper as if it were a burden. With immovable tranquillity they dipped their fingers into the holy water. Patiently they stood for grace. With utmost restraint they munched the Trappist bread and tormented their bodies with a light collation of barley coffee and thin soup.

"Come," invited the incongruously jovial Guestmaster. "I will show you our sleeping quarters."

He took me to the third floor where, as far as I was concerned, the barren, inelegant suite was ready for St. Benedict. The tier of wooden cells ranging the wall looked like voting booths in a country town. Dingy brown canvas flaps hung over entrances between thin veneer partitions which extended neither to the ceiling nor to the floor.

"It is what *The Rule* calls for," explained my guide: "'All shall sleep in a common room on separate couches.'"

He lifted a flap and I stepped inside a four-by-six enclosure. The couch was a straw pallet on a raised board. This was the defendant's final negation of the physical man! In this beggarly habitat flight from the world was complete. I lay down.

"Tell me, Father Guestmaster, don't these beds ever get any softer?"

"They get harder all the time!"

"Why don't you put fresh straw in them?"

"They're just right the way they are," he assured me. "When you sleep on something like this, you're glad to get up at two o'clock!"

The hard bed was not the worst of it. The great silence of the night, the fearsome hour of rising, the sight of men who walked with their thoughts, revealing only submission to primitive practices, these I learned to endure as the days passed. I was able to accustom myself to confinement and fasting.

There was something else, something that I was sure I could never endure: the routine. The everlasting sameness. Matins, Lauds, Prime, the offices, the Angelus, work, Interval, sleep, awaking—Matins, Lauds, Prime, the offices—— Trappist life was a wheel. The eight canonical hours were the spokes in the perpetually turning wheel of the monastic day. The Mass was the hub. The night watch started the wheel turning. Matins, Lauds, Prime. "Lord God, King of Heaven and Earth! Vouchsafe this day to direct us!" Tierce, Sext, None. The wheel brought up the sun. The wheel brought the rain and the mist. The Angelus, the Intervals. It dragged the sun across the meridian. Examen, the Angelus, the Intervals. It crushed me in its tired fury. It molded every man into the Trappist matrix and leveled all to the tedious dimension of a life for sacrifice. Vespers, Compline. "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy! Our life, our sweetness and our hope!" Day died behind the monastery walls. Sleep, awake. Matins, Lauds, Prime, the offices!

During the second week I spoke to the Father Guestmaster about George Calmer.

"I would not know him—" the Guestmaster shrugged—"and to speak to the Father Prior—no. What does it matter? Here we are all the same. And why speak to anyone in the community? Can't you feel what is in the heart of another? And remember—when the soul talks with God it has no desire for conversation with men. A monk may receive permission to speak, but what is there to say? Where are the words that can express what the soul feels? Ask me what you want to know. I will tell you."

His face bore an enigmatical smile. It spoke of a strange freedom. It held a secret charter for peace in all circumstances. Surprised at nothing, envious of no one, secure in his calling, he reflected a tranquillity of mind which ever deepened my wonder and my questioning.

One day he took me to a room where a collection of Madonna prints covered every available inch of wall.

"It is the Father Abbot's hobby," he said happily. "There are more than four hundred. You should meet the beloved Abbot. He has crossed the ocean forty times. He is on a trip now. He must keep in touch with things. He has already been in two automobile accidents in his many travels. Come, I will show you something else that is wonderful."

We went to the "shrine room," a repository which might have been both museum and salon. Displayed in long, white wall cabinets behind the great altar were a series of ornamented metal reliquaries. Within these arks, resting on velvet strips, were hundreds of treasured relics of the saints.

"The Father Abbot collected these during his work as apostolic administrator in France, in Ireland, in monasteries in many parts of the world. These were brought here in solemn procession. That you should have seen. The beloved Abbot in miter and stole, crozier in hand, leading the community. Please God that he comes back soon, safe and sound!"

The Father Abbot often became the subject of our conversation. Elected by qualified members of the choir religious, he had served Our Lady of Gethsemani for thirty-six years. He was now in his early eighties. With all his privileges of travel and purchasing and mingling with the world, he lived as the humblest of his subjects, ate with the community, fasted, slept on the hard pallet and demonstrated a humility and discipline far beyond that achieved by the most menial in the brotherhood.

Slowly, through the lifted curtain of the Guestmaster's confidence in me, I was made aware that the monks considered themselves the unworthy children of this saintly man. He was their spiritual parent. God and *The Rule* had given him the responsibility of accounting to the Lord on the Day of Judgment for the souls in his monastic keeping. Unlimited power lay in his hands. It was his to admonish, reprove, bless or condemn. But the primary function of his office was the salvation of souls.

I determined that someday I would meet the Father Abbot, globe-trotting recluse and guardian of Gethsemani. He, better than anyone, would tell me what went on in the hearts and minds of those who came to give up everything that I longed and lived for out in the world.

Then, one day, as I stood on the third floor of the monastery looking out over the wall, I saw a car drive up and stop at the end of the graveled lane. A boy in his early twenties jumped out. He was followed by a girl in her early teens and by a man and woman. The man took a suitcase from the car and said something to the boy who was already eagerly approaching the gate. Reluctantly the woman followed. That was all I could see. The group had passed out of my sight behind the curtain of the wall.

I saw the Gatekeeper limp out of his room and fumble with the keys on his metal ring. He opened the gate reluctantly and the boy came in alone. Behind him the gate was closed. He set down his suitcase in the canopied entrance and tossed his hat on top of it. Fists jammed against his hips, his brown overcoat thrown back, he viewed the premises of Our Lady of Gethsemani. The Gatekeeper led him in the direction of the abbey. The boy picked up his belongings, caught up with his guide and courageously fell in step.

For a few days I had permission to speak to this aspiring postulant. He was twenty-two, a college graduate, and had worked in a circuit judge's office in Cincinnati. In his offhand, excitable way, he never entered into my anxiety for details or my concern over the enforced routine. He was as disinterested about Trappist demands as he was enthusiastic over the prospect of becoming a monk as fast as the monastery rules allowed. When the choir members filed from the services, hands folded inside their long sleeves, he mechanically stuck his hands into the sleeves of his coat. When the offices were chanted, he hummed along. He walked in the yard reverently mimicking the priests by clasping his palms together. Dreams were in his eyes and in a conquering voice he often said, "This is it!"

"Why do you want to become a Trappist, Herbert?" I asked.

"It's a vocation. A call."

"How did the call come to you?"

"God said, 'Can you do it?' I said, 'Sure!' "

"You heard a voice?"

"Who knows what it was?" he replied with a shrug. "As long as I can remember I always wondered why I was here in the world. What's the reason, the purpose? What should I do with my life? Along comes the answer: 'Be a Trappist!' That's all there is to it."

"You don't mind giving up everything in the world?"

"Mind? Look what I'm getting!"

"What?"

He replied slowly and seriously, as if answering this question for the first time, "Heaven. And those I love get heaven, too. God never turns down a man who is really sincere and willing to give up everything, even life, for Him."

Herbert always came around to that. The Trappist goal had been carved deeply into his thinking: "A man becomes a monk because he feels called to be a monk and for no other purpose or object whatever, nor as a preparation for anything else, except everlasting life."

"Is there nothing that will hold you back?" I asked. "Don't you ever wonder whether you can go through with it?"

He answered distantly, "I looked for peace and an ideal in the world and found only wounds. This is the life."

So, during the concluding days of my retreat I had before me another George Calmer whose quest in life apparently was at an end. In his *Postulant's Guide* Herbert heavily underscored the words, "Our order is at one and the same time a shelter for innocence, a refuge for weakness and an assured hope for souls tossed about on the stormy sea of life. None save joyful hearts and beaming countenances are here, because happiness is sought at its true source; not in objects which preoccupy and defile the heart, but in the things that are alone substantial and abiding."

Often his eyes were moist as he read to me believingly words that I had read many times during my stay. We went together to Matins, Lauds, Prime, the offices. . . . He always knelt with his rosary in hand and with an excited, breathless gaze fastened on the kneeling figures. Through him I felt the subtle challenge to a life of sacrifice. Gradually I came to understand the lure of mental discipline and the generative power of heartfelt prayer. The prostrate forms and the dimly lighted sanctuary became meaningful and even hallowed. There was something here that I wanted to take back with me into the world, a self-mastery and quiet, a peace of heart and mind, and I found myself frequently lowering my head over folded hands. Matins, Lauds, Prime . . .

The world with its unrest and tensions, the heartless struggle of men, crime, pain, worry and wars, these the Church, like a sheltering angel, held at bay so that her hermit sons might work without care, preparing their souls for a heaven in which they believed and offering themselves as guaranty for the souls of those they loved.

"Even the parish priests have a hard time in the world," said the Guestmaster to Herbert and me one day. "They have so much on their minds and so much to distract them. We have nothing to do, nothing to think of, nothing to care for or work for but the Master."

We were standing behind the altar when he told us that. Near us was a stained-glass window with a beautiful and artistic design. I asked the Guestmaster what the scene depicted.

"It is based on legend," he explained, "but maybe it is true. It shows a Trappist working in a field one day and when the Angelus rang he knelt down to pray. There he had a vision of the Holy Mother in a great blue mantle. She was surrounded by all of the various saintly orders of Mother Church, but no Trappists were in sight. And so he said to her, 'Holy Mother, where are my beloved Trappists?' And she spread out her blue mantle and had them all shielded close to her."

Somehow I felt the truth of that legend when I said good-by to Brother Joseph, the Guestmaster, Herbert and the Father Prior. I thought of it when I rode in silence to the depot at Gethsemani. Little did I realize that I would visit the other Trappist abbeys in the United States and Canada before seeing Our Lady of Gethsemani again.

My interest in Trappist life took me to Georgia where monks were living in a barn near Conyers, building the monastery of Our Lady of the Holy Ghost. Near Cumberland, Rhode Island, I saw Our Lady of the Valley. In Manitoba, south of Winnipeg, I visited Our Lady of the Desert.

North of Pecos, New Mexico, I sat with the Father Prior in the ranch house which the monks were converting into Our Lady of Guadalupe. I had been a bad prophet. I had predicted that the monasteries could not grow in America. I had felt that the life was too out of keeping with everything upon which we Americans had set our hearts. I was mistaken. The Trappist order was flourishing. It was appealing to young men, thinking men, seekers for a philosophy and a way of life.

At New Melleray Abbey at Peosta, Iowa, I recorded the offices on wire by special permission of the abbey officials. Here I frequently spent the night in the rapidly growing community unguarded by a wall.

Wherever I went, the life and routine were the same, the vows were rigorously enforced, and the attention of the religious was focused on the dim and distant star of everlasting life. Wherever I saw Trappists, I saw George Calmer and Herbert. They were reflected in every seriously silent lay monk and member of the priesthood. I always saw them ritually absorbed into an order that assimilated men body and soul.

How thorough this assimilation really was, I realized when a Trappist challenge to my all-too-liberal Protestantism called me back to Gethsemani. I could not believe that more than two years had passed according to my worldly occupied timetable. By reckoning monastic routine, I had not been away at all. The monk with his buggy, the Gatekeeper, the Father Guestmaster, Brother Joseph, they were exactly where I had left them just yesterday! Matins, Lauds, Prime, the offices, the Angelus, work, Interval, sleep, awake . . . The Trappist clock ticked out its perpetual hours.

"Things do change!" The Guestmaster laughed. "Herbert is already wearing his habit and has taken his temporary vows. He gets along well." Then his voice grew tender. "It is not so well with the dear Father Abbot. It is too bad you will not meet him."

"Is he here?"

"He is in the infirmary. He is dying."

I went to hear the *Salve* at the office of Compline. The long corridor that led to the guest balcony was dimly lighted. Silence hung heavily and the air was stuffy and confined. But from the guest balcony I caught sight of a pair of eager eyes that flashed at me for a moment and then turned away. In them I caught the hint of happy conquest. Herbert dared betray the passion which the others forcibly concealed. Was this his "first love" and would it one day be subdued and quieted in the solemn assignment of looking forward to death's greater promise? Whatever it was, just now he was where his heart had led him, and I, in the guest balcony, still had my worldly world. Herbert must have been the despair and also the delight of his superiors, for it seemed to me that, far above the others, I could hear his voice ring out in the ancient chant, *"Salve Regina, Mater Misericordae——"*

In a lowly cell on a cot in the infirmary the Father Abbot slept. Near his couch stood the Father Infirmarian. Motionlessly he looked down on the white, drawn face of his beloved Superior who was nearing the reality toward which his eighty-three years had led. Always in his travels he had willed to live so that he might die in his dear Kentucky abbey. His wish was being granted. He was where he wanted to be, enfolded in the tender compassion of Our Lady of Gethsemani.

On a winter morning at five-thirty the monks were assembling for the office of Prime. The altar candles were lighted. The white and brown-clad worshipers gathered in the abbey church. Into the familiar scene came the Father Subprior, walking quickly, intently, beckoning attention. Members of the choir religious followed him out, leaving a small group to complete the office. The Subprior led them to where the Father Abbot lay. A murmur of voices spread their mantle of prayers gently over the dying man.

Quickly, quietly, before the petitions were finished, the Father Abbot opened his eyes. A searching glance roved over the faces of his beloved Trappists. He closed his tired eyes. His lips moved in a wordless prayer and he fell asleep.

From the Father Prior came a tremulous whisper, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, praised be the name of the Lord."

Four days later, very early in the morning, a cold rain fell over Our Lady of Gethsemani. Heaven was weeping for the Father Abbot. Softly, sadly the Angelus sounded in the abbey church. The flicker of candles appeared in the church door. They moved through the dark corridor and into the bleak, frosty morning. The rain struck at the tiny flames. White forms hunched their bodies over the candles protectingly. Long rows of flickering tapers outlined the slowly moving, saintly procession. Behind the brown-clad monks came cardinals, bishops, abbots, monsignors, priests and Catholic laymen—Mother Church and the world came mourning for her son.

The Father Abbot's body lay coffinless on a wooden slab. Four members of his beloved choir religious bore him through the hallowed grounds while behind them walked a monk holding in reverent hands the small, black iron cross which was to mark the Abbot's grave. The cortege moved through the beating rain chanting psalms. They reached the place which the Father Abbot had chosen as his final cell in the cloister of the silent earth. He had asked to be buried among those on whom he had conferred the Trappist vows and who had gone on before him to that eternal abbey in a better land. Here the body, clad in plain white habit, was laid on a sheet and lowered coffinless into the grave. The monks chanted. A cardinal read the prayers.

The Abbot was then covered with clods of clay that fell harshly from the hesitant hands of the faithful. Then came two lay monks with shovels. The mourners waited, their heads low against their habits, until the grave was filled. A monk's worn hands pressed the cross into the wet ground. The chant of lamentation rose three times: "Lord, have mercy on a sinner."

The brown and white-clad monks returned in procession to the abbey church. It was the march of the eternal company of penitents who since St. Benedict had tamed their bodies to save their souls. Their faces bore the marks of honest seeking. The rigorous Trappist existence had imparted to them a luxury I could not define and a sense of security that I could only dimly understand. They were men of another world.

Yet, somewhere in the group were acquaintances of mine who had ended their search for something to live by. Somewhere in the ranks of these Silent Ones was a friend whose faith held him fast in the path of self-abandon. His way was exacting, difficult, extreme. It was not my way, but it was his. There was a saying singing in the wheel of abbey days which he believed and to which he was willingly dedicating his life, "It is hard to live as a Trappist, but it is easy to die as one."

CHAPTER III

THE VEDANTIST

MY FIRST VISIT to a Vedanta service was at the invitation of Kenneth Lawler. I went seeking, knowing little more about Vedanta than that it was a name in the Los Angeles telephone directory, listed in the classified section under "Churches, Various Denominations." I had difficulty in locating the church because it was tucked away in the nineteen-hundred block on residential Ivar Avenue.

It was well after eleven on a sunny Sunday morning when I came to a line of expensive cars parked along the curb. Kenneth was anxiously waiting for me behind the wheel of his Buick convertible. The previous year he had driven a Cadillac. That was the only difference I noticed. Kenneth was just the same—dark-haired and handsome, fastidiously dressed, his cigarette poised characteristically between thumb and forefinger.

"It looks," I bantered, "as if only the idle rich attend these services."

"A common misconception," he answered, smiling, as he extended his hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you. Hope you didn't mind coming here so soon after arriving in town."

He was already eagerly taking me up the steps which led from the sidewalk to a landscaped terrace.

"I was surprised, Ken, that you suggested going to a service. I didn't know you were particularly interested."

"This is different," he said.

We were approaching an attractive chalk-white temple set intimately in modest surroundings of flowers and shrubs. The building resembled a small Taj with lettering in Sanskrit inscribed on the plaster portal.

"Been going here long?" I asked.

"Off and on for about three months. It's too bad we're late. We may have to stand."

He was right about that. The temple was crowded. The pews which accommodated about seventy-five people were augmented by rows of chairs for this morning gathering. We were compelled to stand in the vestibule behind a group of men. Fortunately both Kenneth and I were tall and could get a fair view of the congregation. About evenly divided between men and women, the worshipers might have been an audience in any conventional church in greater Los Angeles.

The distinctive features of this sanctuary, however, were a fragrance of Oriental incense and pictures of Jesus, Buddha and other religious figures on the walls. Within the church chancel or shrine the portrait of a Hindu saint occupied a central position. To the right was a picture of Jesus and to the left one of the Holy Mother.

Seated motionless in the chancel was a youthful-looking Hindu dressed in an ochre cassock. He added an impressive note of complacency by his perfect repose.

A tall, slightly built, scholarly man in his late forties was addressing the congregation. He was an American, deeply sun-tanned, and wore a russet sport coat that contrasted sharply with his green slacks. I listened only casually, surmising that he was merely making remarks preliminary to introducing the Hindu. But as I looked about the audience I became aware that their interest in the speaker's words was intense and that Kenneth was already in the grip of an extraordinary influence. The group with us in the narrow corridor was also unusually alert to what was being said. Evidently the man had been speaking for some time and had succeeded in winning the enrapt attention of the congregation. Persuaded more by this fact than by the speaker's words or manner, I, too, began to listen carefully.

"We lack spiritual power," came the supremely confident voice, "because of our compromise with evil. Yet there is ever in us the conscious tie with an infinite force of good. There is ever the pull of spiritual growth. Step by step we mount the spiral stairway to the reality of God. The germ of our eternal life is growing, consuming the husk of our ego. . . ."

He paused and the hush that hovered over the people reflected breathless interest.

"The spiral," he continued compellingly, "leads us upward to the only Reality, but we are held back by the slavery of actions and thoughts. We are led forward by the timeless, illimitable light in which for an instant spins the dim speck of the temporal universe. We strive to orient ourselves in the upward course, becoming ever more like that which we think, like that which we see. We rise from servanthood to friendship, to Sonship. . . ."

There was something about all this that stirred my curiosity. The few hurriedly spoken lines, detached and not always clear, touched me with conflicting sensations. I sensed a dynamism deep within this speaker's convictions. His humility mingled with an intellectual arrogance. He was challenging my thoughts about religion, straightening out my ideas, rebuking my aimless ways and inviting me to ascend with him the mystic spiral stairs.

"We rise spiritually," he proclaimed, "through purgation. We rise into illumination and upward to creative purpose. If we look back we see an idealism that is shame. We see a realism that is despair. The eternal and ultimate good is the presence of God. The spiral! The spiral leads from self-consciousness to union with the All, from self-love to love of God. Then our ego dies and we are born. We empty ourselves of self and the Spirit fills us."

Sincerity and compassion throbbed in the words. I was being drawn into the orbit of something astonishingly persuasive, my eagerness betraying my own quest. My mind reached out to grasp hidden meanings in this mingling of religious ideas. I looked inquiringly at Kenneth. My glance assured me that he had no doubt this was inspired wisdom.

"What is spirituality? It is a way of life above the laws of equity. It is a knowledge beyond the physical. A science of being, higher than that which we feel and know with our five senses. Our ego cries against it. Our ego would hold us back, chained to decadent concepts of what we have been taught is good, arguing that all there is to our existence is what our physical nature can perceive. Conquering our ego and slaying it, we rise in the spiral, knowing that the only worth-while acts are those which make us higher beings, knowing that God has prepared for us a fate beyond our dreams."

By virtue of the hypnotic symbol of the spiral, by the psychical rapport of those around me, by a power I could not explain, I was being conquered. In this rare, transfigured moment, I stood on the high plateau of inspiration, seeing before me the upward path. In thought I was ascending. Within me a new conviction called; beyond me the goal beckoned. I listened, and when I was told that this was "Self calling to Self," I believed it. I believed it so much that the speaker only echoed my own conclusions when he said, "Here we stand at the top of the spiral, yielding and receiving, until with us, as a pivot, God raises the fallen and redeems the world."

His sermon was over. No one in the audience moved or relaxed. With impressive calm and feeling the Hindu rose quietly and recited, "Lead us from the unreal to the real. Lead us from death to immortality. Lead us from darkness to light. Light us through and through and guide us evermore with thy loving presence. Peace, peace, peace." Then he spoke briefly in Sanskrit. In a moment the service was over, and Kenneth and I were walking back to the car in silence.

We got in and Kenneth sat with his arms over the steering wheel. Other cars were soon driving away. A spell hung over the people who walked from the service, a spell that I understood, an outreach into something cosmic, not known but felt.

Finally he said, "Well, what do you think?"

"It looks," I had to confess, "as though this comes very close to being *it*. Who is this fellow?"

"Gerald Heard," he informed me.

I recognized the name, but not in the field of religion.

"Heard?" I reflected. "I read an exciting mystery story written by a Gerald Heard."

Kenneth lighted a cigarette thoughtfully. "I have no doubt you did," he observed. "And if you read about a Gerald Heard lecturing at Oxford some years ago or winning the Hertz prize in the field of anthropology, or if you should hear that he was once an announcer in London on BBC, he's the man."

"Is he the minister here?"

"No. Guest speaker."

"But you've heard him before?"

"Only once."

"Was he as effective as he was today?"

"Yes," Kenneth replied.

"Well, is he a minister? Is he a D.D.? What is he?"

"To hang a degree on him," Kenneth said with finality, "would be as appropriate as hanging it on one of Jesus' apostles."

With an expression of distaste at the thought, he started the motor.

"You still haven't told me who this man Heard is," I prodded.

"You can see who he is," he said, as if stating an obvious fact. "A mystic."

As we drove to the boulevard, I felt that I was riding with a stranger, although I had known Kenneth Lawler for nearly ten years. He had been one of my students in a college class. Everyone secretly envied Kenneth, for it was well known that he came from an unusually wealthy family and that he was "in annuities up to his ears." He had never done any manual labor in his life. For religion he had always had only a mild empirical interest. He loved to read, had spent most of his years since graduation in travel and maintained a small but luxurious apartment in Beverly Hills. Both his parents had been killed in a plane crash. On my trip to Los Angeles the year before he would not have gone to church at all, for he seldom rose before ten or eleven o'clock. To find him more than mildly interested in religion and to hear him refer to someone as a "mystic" was a new chapter in Kenneth Lawler's story.

"Do you know Heard personally?" I asked.

"No, I never met him."

"Where does he live? What does he do?"

"To tell you the truth," Kenneth explained, "I'm more interested in what he says than in who he is."

"Is the Hindu the minister?"

"Vedanta doesn't have ministers," he said. "It has directors or leaders. The Hindu was Swami Prabhavananda."

"Have you met him?"

"No."

"Do you know Vedanta very well?" I persisted.

"It's not the kind of thing you pick up in three months," Kenneth answered.

"All I know about it is that it's a Hindu philosophy."

"Strictly speaking, it's more than a philosophy," I was told. "It includes cosmic consciousness."

Again I was amazed. I would never have associated any reference to cosmic consciousness with Kenneth Lawler.

"What's your interest, Ken?" I had to ask. "Are you really looking for something to believe?"

"I suppose I am," he reflected.

"Mind telling me what happened?"

"Just picked up a book in my uncle's library one day. Something by Aldous Huxley. I noticed a reference to Vedanta and later found out about this place on Ivar Avenue."

"Went up and 'heard Heard'?" I suggested facetiously.

He dismissed the pun with a smile, then said, "That's right. By the way, where would you like to have dinner?"

We decided to drive around to the Gourmet Restaurant on Sunset where we had eaten a number of times during the past years. Never before had our conversation revolved around religion—certainly not around a Hindu religion. Never before had Kenneth spoken with such inner compulsion about a faith which to me had connotations only of incense and brooding swamis.

"What have you found in Vedanta that you didn't find in Protestantism?" I demanded.

"It answers questions I've been asking for a long time," he said.

"For example?"

"Purpose of life. Reality of God. Soul. What to live by. Wondering whether anyone ever really *had* the answers. Funny thing about us Christians," he mused: "we think we have a corner on religion. We think we have the only sacred writings because we have the Bible. *We Christians,* listen to me! Born a Presbyterian," he reflected, "attended Episcopalian services, admired the Catholics but didn't like their political machinery. Liked the Protestants but always thought they had turned the churches into service clubs. Didn't like the cults, couldn't stand the revivalists, despised the radio preachers——"

"But loved the Lord," I completed for him.

"That's right," he said pleased. "Let's order."

We did, but nothing could get him off the subject of Vedanta for long, and nothing could keep me from prying out information.

"Very well," I agreed, "Vedanta is an answer to your quest. You haven't told me what it has that the churches don't have."

"First of all," he explained, as if confirming his own analysis, "Vedanta goes 'way back. Back to the Vedas, the holy books of India which antedate the Bible. In the Vedas are the Upanishads, and in the Upanishads is the basis of Vedanta philosophy.

The Upanishads came in as the later Vedic literature, and Vedanta means 'the end of the Vedas' or the 'end of wisdom.' "

"And what *is* the end of wisdom?" I inquired.

"The fundamental principle of Vedanta," he said, "is as simple as any Christian concept and a great deal more revolutionary. Vedanta teaches that what we call 'self' is actually not self in the sense of body or personality, but that the true 'self' is identical with God."

"That is no different than the saying of Jesus, 'I and the Father are one.' "

"That is exactly what Vedanta says. But Vedanta refers not only to the relationship of Jesus to God, but also to the relationship of every living soul to God."

"Kenneth Lawler and God are one?" I asked searchingly.

"Self and God are one," he corrected. "That is what Heard was driving at this morning. He used 'Sonship' in order that we of the Christian tradition might understand. Actually Vedanta teaches Oneness with God. But God, to the Vedantist, is known as Brahman."

"The same God by another name?"

"True God by *any* name is still true God," Kenneth said with finality. "It is all the same whether one calls him Jahweh, Allah, Ormazd or Brahman. Vedanta is monotheistic. The Upanishads are monotheistic."

"And," I said to clarify a point, "is everyone an emanation of Brahman?"

"Not an emanation," Kenneth insisted. "Not a part or a reflection or even a son of Brahman. Every soul is Brahman entire and indivisible."

"In other words, 'I am God' or, rather, 'I am Brahman'?"

"The Upanishads say, 'That art thou' or 'He who is yonder, yonder person, I myself am he.' So the chief purpose of man entails more than the phrase which you and I learned, 'to glorify God and love Him forever.' The purpose of life is to recognize that the soul within us is the real self and that this real self is actually God or Brahman. This made me realize for the first time that the world of people is the world of God. We ought to do good deeds and charitable acts, not to emulate Jesus or for the sake of any ethical or moral creed, but because everyone is exactly what we are, Brahman."

"Brahman entire and indivisible," I concluded. "Of course, that is very much like the idea of the mystical body of Christ."

"I know of no Christian church," Kenneth answered, "which carries the idea of the mystical body of Christ across the boundaries of race and creed. Vedanta does. In Vedanta there is no such thing as one religion being inferior or superior to another; they are simply different with different virtues and different faults."

"So Vedanta is all-inclusive?"

"It includes the philosophies of all religions, yes," Kenneth affirmed.

Religion dominated our conversation, although I did ask occasional questions about friends we had in common, inquired about his uncle, and talked to him about plans he had for a South American trip. He said he thought he would wait and perhaps go to India. This notion hinted at the enthusiasm of a dilettante, I thought, and again I assured myself that Vedanta was a fancy that would pass. But he kept coming back to Gerald Heard's sermon and I, too, reflected once more on the inspiration of that hour.

"The spiral is a favorite symbol," Kenneth explained. "It helps one visualize a definite route in the attainment of truth."

"From what you've told me," I said, "I don't see much difference between Vedanta and Christianity. The one thing that might be different, I suppose, is the plan of salvation. Very likely the redemptive work of Jesus would have to be rejected."

"Redefined," Kenneth corrected. "The more I learn about Vedanta the better I understand Jesus. He was the great demonstrator. He expressed our highest ideals perfectly in his life."

"Which means—?"

"The theology of Vedanta is very interesting," he explained. "The Brahman-self idea is difficult for us to grasp only because we will not believe that the self *is* Brahman. Why won't we believe this? Because we think of self as a physical body, and that is because of ignorance. Vedanta has a word for this ignorance—avidya. Avidya is wrong cognition. Avidya says, 'The real you is the physical being. It is limited and imperfect.' Avidya says that. But opposing avidya is right cognition which Vedanta terms vidya. It is a higher knowledge, an awareness of the real truth. It proves to man that self *is* one with Brahman. Anything else is illusion. Pain and pleasure, fear and hope, good fortune and bad are all fallacies of the lower knowledge. Limitless and attributeless self, oneness with Brahman identify the higher knowledge. So the spiral represents man's journey, guided upward by vidya or right cognition."

"Until one is lost in God," I ventured.

"Emancipated," Kenneth affirmed.

"I still can't see anything in Vedanta that is radically different from Christianity," I argued. "The Christian mystics talked about emancipation, too."

"Of course they did," Kenneth agreed. "Vedanta would be the first to concede that mystics of *every* religion have realized their oneness with God. But will Christianity concede the same to Vedanta or any other faith? We Christians insist on being exclusive. We send missionaries to India, looking for the day when we can say, 'Now, at last, we've saved the heathen.' Saved them from what? Converted them to what? India has always been the land of soul culture and the mystical life."

I felt like saying that it was also the land of the untouchables and of poverty and superstition, but all I knew about these things had come to me through hearsay and impressions. Perhaps it would be interesting to do some research in that field. Perhaps I should meet Gerald Heard and study Vedantic literature. But I suspected that by the time I got around to all that, Kenneth Lawler would in all probability be speaking of his interest in Vedanta in the past tense.

The next day I was called to Chicago and invited to prepare the script for a dramatic spectacle planned as part of the city's centennial observance. The urgency of a deadline and an early production date in Chicago's Civic Opera House made me forget all about Brahman and vidya and avidya. Even the symbol of the spiral was forgotten. But one day while working in the Newberry Library on the sequence of the Columbian Exposition, I ran across a word: Vedanta; and a name, Vivekananda; and a story filled with fanciful phrases: "Man is a spirit, him the sword cannot pierce, him the fire cannot burn, him the water cannot melt, him the air cannot destroy. Every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere. . . ."

The sayings were Oriental, the circumstances typically American, for Vivekananda, who came to the Parliament of Religions in 1893 as the Hindu delegate, seemed himself to be a soul whose bounds were indefinable. It was reported, according to the record of the Parliament, that he looked and dressed like a prince, yet he was a disciple of the famed Ramakrishna who despised money and rejected the goods of this world.

Chicagoans of the gay '90s saw Vivekananda in dazzling cassocks and silken turbans, but when his funds ran out they found him begging on the streets. In the lobbies of the best hotels he enjoyed the attention of wealthy women; in the city's slums he liked being with the poor. He was a mixture of calculating wisdom and simple piety, a man of universal knowledge and guileless mind, a master of possessive calm and a slave to emotion. He was both a mystic and a willing recipient of the riches and comfort of the wealthy; a Hindu who loved Christ, a contemplative who enjoyed society; an apostle of contradictions who trained himself to embrace the world in order to persuade others to embrace heaven.

At the Parliament of Religions he was the most popular figure, the ablest speaker and the most fluent disciple of the basic unity of all faith. "I will quote to you, brethren," he said, "a few lines from a hymn which I remember from earliest boyhood, a hymn which is repeated every day by millions of human beings: 'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.' "

His English was flawless, his voice was described as being "melodious as the sound of a harp." His words were the parables of Vedantic philosophy and the Hindu faith. "The Hindu religion," he explained, "does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing; not in believing, but in being and becoming. The whole struggle is a constant striving to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God, and this reaching God, this seeing God, this becoming perfect, even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus."

When the Parliament closed he received a tremendous ovation until he said, "Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become earth or air or water? No. It becomes a plant; it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth and the water, converts them into plant substance and grows a plant. . . . If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that on the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance: *Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, harmony and peace and not dissension.*"

Vivekananda was India's first missionary to America and the founder of the Vedanta Society in the United States. Headquarters were established in New York in 1898, and thereby an Eastern religion officially invaded the Western world. To those who looked upon this intrusion as an impertinence there came the gentle reminder that Christianity itself had been imported from the East and that the Upanishads had preceded the New Testament by nearly a thousand years. If America had the audacity to send ministers with the Bible to India, why should not India send swamis with the Vedas to the United States?

India did send them, but progress was slow. In fifty years

Vedanta gained less than a thousand converts. In half a century it could claim no more than a dozen churches, all located in metropolitan centers: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, St. Louis, Denver, Portland, Providence, Chicago.

By comparison Christianity had done much better in India, and mission boards pointed to a hundred thousand converts in the same period with schools and churches all the way from the Punjab to Madras. The philosophy of "That art thou" and "I am Brahman" was apparently no match for the faith that said, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him."

Yet when I concluded that Vedanta was not for America, I thought about Kenneth Lawler and when I was about to write it off as an unpopular cult, I received an enthusiastic letter from him urging me by all means to get a copy of *Hinduism Invades America* by Wendell Thomas.

He went on to say:

> Don't miss the introduction by Fosdick. He says that religion in America can no longer escape the influence of Hinduism. I am beginning to verify this prophecy in my own experience. Do not judge it in the light of denominational patterns. Its aim is not to start a new church but to teach a philosophy of life, a philosophy that harmonizes with Christianity *if* you are willing to take away the dead weight of creeds and churchcraft. Doctrines which the churches have made vague and involved, Vedanta makes clear and concise. Teachings I thought commonplace have suddenly become vital. Here is an example: "If you love not your brother, whom ye have seen, how can you love God whom ye have not seen?" The lines never meant anything to me until I found their counterpart in the Upanishads:

> He who sees himself in all beings,
> And all beings in himself,
> He enters the supreme Brahma
> By this means and no other.

Why did I find more meaning in these words than in the well-known Bible text? Is it possible that familiarity with Christian teachings has bred contempt for their true worth? Perhaps we need a collateral scripture. What do you think?

I had a question of my own: "Wouldn't it be possible to find the same re-evaluation of faith by going back to the teachings of Christ? Why settle for Vedanta if it is only a collateral scripture?"

He replied:

Do you know where the Catholic Church breaks with Protestantism? Most Protestants contend that the Bible contains God's complete revelation. If it's in the Bible, it's true. If it isn't, it isn't God's word. To this Catholics answer, "There is another repository of truth and grace, and it existed before the Bible appeared. It is God's word *in the Church.*" The teaching of the Church is, therefore, as important to the Catholic as is the teaching of Scripture. In fact, Catholicism interprets and defines Scripture by means of revelation *through the Church.*

Vedanta goes beyond both Protestantism and Catholicism by maintaining that neither the Church nor the Bible contains all of God's revelations to man. Vedanta says that God manifested Himself in other holy writings and in other holy movements long before the curtain ever rose on the Christian era. Revelations? Vedanta believes in revelations and also in revelators like Jesus. True followers of Vedanta respect the humanity and recognize the divinity of Jesus as the most ardent Christians do. They believe that He demonstrated more of the nature of God than we do because He was better able to distinguish Self from the limiting conditions which they call upadhis. In essence, however, Jesus could never be more of a "Son of God" than we are, for that which lives in us is wholly and completely God (Brahman) just as it was in Him. Jesus simply revealed to the utmost what we reveal in the least, our oneness with the All-Soul Brahman or God. Our assignment is to recognize our union with God as He did.

You asked me whether I could not have reached these conclusions in the Christian faith. All I can say is, "I didn't." Strange, isn't it?

The possibility of a man becoming a more active Christian due to a non-Christian philosophy was a highly dramatic and perilous situation. I fully intended to follow it through, but for several months our correspondence was interrupted. I was preoccupied with the problem of making money, and Kenneth was very likely back to the problem of spending his.

Then one day my attention was called to a full-column advertisement in a popular magazine announcing:

INDIA
SPECIALIZES IN SOUL CULTURE

Each land makes its distinct contribution to world-culture, America has specialized in industrial expansion, England in political science, Germany in mechanical inventions, France in art, Italy in music, China in social relations. *India from time immemorial has specialized in the science of the soul.* Learn the divine soul-unveiling teachings that have kept India's culture alive through millenniums of vicissitudes. The Self-Realization Fellowship of America and India will gladly send to every inquirer a copy of its enlightening booklet, inspired by Paramhansa Yogananda whose teachings are available to sincere seekers in the Western world. . . .

I mailed in the coupon and soon the postman was bringing in the golden sheaves of Self-Realization from the headquarters at 3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles. I was invited to participate in the glorious experience of sharing "the joy of Christ, the peace and tranquillity of the Buddha, the love of St. Francis." I was urged to investigate the services of the SRF to learn how I, too, might experience the inner illumination which was bringing "prosperity, happiness and success" to many thousands. I sent for the booklet, "Highest Achievements through Self-Realization."

A convenient and detailed membership blank came with this gift. It was in the spirit of the advertisements: "In the Ancient Scriptures the Lord said: *Out of one thousand, one seeks Me: out of the thousand who seek Me, one knows Me.* Blessed are you who have been seeking. We, of the Self-Realization Fellowship, joyfully select and cordially invite you to join us wholeheartedly, so that you may receive the Key-Instructions which will enable you to 'know Him,' and which will reveal to you all the liberating truths about every aspect of your life. . . . The portals are open! Ahead of you are the Seven Steps on the Ladder of Self-Realization, leading to your Final Emancipation."

I was frankly suspicious of this method of promoting religious truths, especially when the application for enrollment which I was urged to sign started out by saying:

> Attention of THE REGISTRAR. Respected One: I am glad to be selected among the Divinely-Privileged Few and hereby accept your invitation to enter the sacred portals of Self-Realization Fellowship and commence its unique scientific and metaphysical Praecepta studies of the Higher Laws and the techniques of Super-Dynamic Living. If I am accepted as a Member by the

> Acceptance Committee, I understand that I shall be entitled to receive the sacred PRAECEPTA studies twice a month, as well as the Additional Privileges of Membership. I hereby enclose and donate to the SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP the sum of TWO DOLLARS as my Membership Enrollment offering . . . and to further donate ONE DOLLAR once a month, so long as I wish to remain a member.

The six additional privileges included: (1) the quarterly *Inner Culture* magazine (later changed to *East-West*); (2) Healing service, the right to partake of Divine Healing Prayer Vibrations sent out each morning by Paramhansa Yogananda and his trained coterie of divine healers; (3) Prosperity Vibrations, sent out regularly from headquarters; (4) Help in Personal Problems through the Personal Problems Department; (5) The Lotus Emblem, "gold-plated in orange and blue enamel," either button or pin; (6) The Membership Card.

Questions on the confidential chart gave an inkling of the portals through which I would be led:

> Do you want to cultivate any special good habit: Magnetic Personality? Optimistic Temperament? Prosperity Magnetism? Happy Disposition? Creative Ability? Attractive Appearance? Calm Nerves? Do you want to change the attitude of anyone toward you? Do you want especially to develop the body? The Mind? Spiritual Faculties? Or All? Do you want to reduce? Or take on flesh? Do you believe in a Supreme Being?

Sorrowfully I thought about my friend, Kenneth Lawler. Was this Vedanta? Was this what he meant when he said that the philosophy of the Vedas was deepening his Christian faith? I never saw a picture of the long-haired Yogananda without feeling deeply concerned over the commercialization of religion in this land of the freedom of faith. Surely Vedanta was many things. It was the asceticism of the sainted Ramakrishna, the lofty interrelation of religions expressed by Vivekananda, the oneness with Brahman about which the Upanishads sang their exalted hymns; it was Gerald Heard leading me upward to a clearer comprehension of Divine Reality; it was Kenneth Lawler finding something to live by; it was Yogananda advertising his cult of Inner Culture.

It was something else. It was a way of life explained to me one day by an Indian student from Madras. I stopped the young lady in front of a Protestant church near the campus of a Midwestern university.

"I know this isn't the proper thing," I said, "but since you are from India I should like to ask you a question."

No doubt she had learned to tolerate the abundant curiosity of Americans. "A question?" she said politely. "What is it, please?"

"I have a friend," I explained, "who is interested in Vedanta. Would you mind telling me just what it is?"

"A way of life," she answered promptly. "A school of thought. A way of salvation."

"Yes," I replied, "I know. But could you possibly explain it so that an ordinary Protestant like me might be able to understand it?"

Smiling she said, "That is quite a question! It would take a long time for me to explain Vedantic philosophy to you. But, you know, it is strange that you should ask me about Vedanta. I was thinking about it today in my course in psychology."

"Are you a psychology major?"

"Education," she said. "I am taking a psychology minor. And you?"

"Religious research," I informed her. "Trying to find out about religion from people rather than from books."

I did not know whether this pleased or amused her, but there must have been magic in the words. A moment later Miss Rukmini Ramasashan and I were sitting in the little chapel of the near-by Protestant church, and I was taking a short course in Vedanta. I wrote it down, for it was not easy.

"You must first understand," she began, "that Indian philosophy is inseparable from Indian religion. The different philosophical schools of thought are classified into two groups; Astika, which is theistic, and Mastika, which is atheistic. There are six of the former and three of the latter. Each of these has many smaller divisions. Vedanta is one of the six Astika schools. Literally translated into English it means the last part of the Vedas. Veda-anta. It is applied to the Upanishads which come at the end of the Vedas. You know the Upanishads?"

Proudly I recalled, "'He who is yonder, yonder person, I myself am he.'"

She laughed cordially. "That," she observed, "is like saying that the heart of the New Testament is John 3:16. But, you know, in a way the Upanishads are the New Testament of the Vedas—a hundred and eight philosophic-religious poems telling of the search for wisdom and absolute truth. The great message of the Upanishads and of Vedanta, of course, is that absolute unity is not found outside of self, but in Self. Self is Brahman. All existence is for and in the Self. This is the atman realizing its true nature. It is expressed as *That Thou Art,* and if you wish to put it down in Sanskrit it is *Tat Tvam asi.*"

"Of course you grew up with Vedanta teaching."

"Yes, I have heard about it from childhood," she explained, "but I did not really begin to understand it until I was a senior in college at the age of nineteen."

"Are all Hindus Vedantists?"

"In the sense that all Hindus realize the divinity in man, in the sense that they all know that the grave is not the final goal, in the sense that they all recognize that so long as personal gain is involved there can be no happiness or salvation for the human soul; in these degrees all Hindus are Vedantists."

"To come back to Vedanta as a way of life," I prompted. "How is a person to understand that?"

"Vedanta has two aspects, positive and negative. In the positive aspect it believes that the world is God. God pervades the world but is not limited by it. In His being He includes and transcends the world. To illustrate, a cylinder when seen from the top presents a circle. But that is not all of it. In the cylinder the circle is included and transcended. The fact that we see only the circle does not limit its nature. Since God is in the world, it is not necessary to run away from the world to be with God. One can be in the world and yet not of the world. 'Like water on a lotus leaf,' they say. 'There is something in the lotus leaf that makes the dewdrops stand like pearls. Yet, if you tilt the leaf, the drops will run off without leaving a mark. When one does one's duty with no consideration of reward, duty passes into a habit, habit into character, character into an ideal, and the ideal merges into God which liberates the soul from bondage.' You have heard that saying?"

"Yes," I said, "I read that some time ago. Vivekananda—the Parliament of Religions."

"Most of the sayings are cradled in the pages of the Vedas."

"I don't remember the application, however," I said.

"Well," she replied, "it is simply this. A person should learn to serve mankind as a service to God. Gandhi will always be our great example. He comes from a long succession of holy ones such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and others."

"And now how about the *negative* aspect of Vedanta?"

"The negative aspect believes that the world as we see it is an illusion, maya. We are representatives of God, we share His divinity, therefore we are infinite. But the soul, linked with a limited body, wrongly identifies itself with the body's limitations. We are deluded into seeing the soul as limited, as extending into space and time, when actually the soul is limitless. This veil of delusion is maya. When the soul is liberated from this veil by means of knowledge, it attains salvation."

"Have you ever heard of Paramhansa Yogananda?"

"It seems to me I have," she said.

"What is this title Paramhansa? What does it mean?"

"It is a higher title than swami. I suppose it is best translated as a 'divine one.' "

"I wish I knew how divine he was," I speculated.

"Why?" she asked.

"He holds out great promises—for a price."

"Why don't you go to see him and find out for yourself?"

"That," I said, "I shall probably do. I suspect that my friend has become quite an ardent follower of this Paramhansa."

"So," she said courteously, "have you asked me all you wish to know?"

"You've been very kind," I assured her. "But I do have one more question, if you don't mind."

"Not at all."

"Would you say that Vedanta is compatible with Christianity?"

"Yes and no," she reflected. "Yes, in the spirit of service which is identical with the gospel of love. Yes, in the connection that the soul as we know it has not attained complete self-realization. Yes, in the belief of retribution and cause and effect. The Hindus call this karma; Christians call it sin and its penalties, blessings and their reward. Yes, in the belief that salvation is a necessary goal in human life."

"And 'no'?"

"No, in the sense that the God of the Vedantists may be reached in many ways. If God is loved and one does one's duties as service to Him, one may gain salvation. Or he may gain it through service to man or through philosophical contemplation or even through scientific experiments in the control of the body and soul. Christianity insists that unless a person be saved through Christ, he will not attain salvation. This idea is incompatible with the eclectic nature of Hinduism."

"I am more than grateful to you," I said.

"You are more than welcome," she replied, going to the chapel door. "It was a pleasure."

"It meant a great deal to me," I assured her, "to get this information finally straight from a Vedantist."

"Did I say I was a Vedantist?" she asked surprised.

"Well, no, come to think of it, you didn't."

"My father is a Methodist minister!" she exclaimed. "How stupid of me not to have mentioned that!"

Advertisements of the Self-Realization Fellowship continued to make their appearance, and circular letters kept coming to me from Yogananda's headquarters.

> Dear Friend in Truth:
>
> Recently you received from us a booklet entitled "Highest Achievements through Self-Realization," which describes the very notable service which we have rendered to countless men and women during the past twenty years.
>
> Great contributions to art, music, literature and science have been made by men and women who have been spiritually awakened. We believe that you too are entitled to this experience, and we want to co-operate in leading you toward that pinnacle of spiritual illumination from which no man returns without a broader vision and a more sublime understanding of all the problems of life. . . . Whether this comes to you in art, music, science or invention depends upon your individual talent. But whether it comes to you AT ALL depends upon what you do with the enclosed application for enrollment.
>
> SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP

I read the mimeographed letter several times and decided to write at once to Kenneth. The policies behind this movement certainly did not fit in with my idea of Vedanta. I had visions of a ruse and wondered if the messianic Yogananda had lured Kenneth into supporting what appeared to be a mail-order religion. In this connection there came to me one day a rather weird piece of mailing. It was a cheap pasteboard envelope with a money slot cut in the front and decorated with a yellow cornucopia on a green background. It looked like an envelope used by churches for special mission-day offerings except that it was sturdier and more garish. Across the top was printed HORN OF PLENTY. Below this the Scriptural promise: "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10.) The only blessings coming out of the sketch of the cornucopia were printed words: Energy, Fearlessness, Work, Will, Joy.

Instructions for use of the bank were unique. I was ordered to drop a contribution each day into the slot, while repeating a prayer, "God is the only, eternal, inexhaustible source of supply. Since I and the Father are one, I know that all that the Father has is mine." At the end of fifty days I was to tear open the bank, convert the coins into a money order or a bank draft and send this offering to THE SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP! In return for my devotion to the SRF cause and the realization of my "oneness with spirit," I was promised an improvement in my financial condition and assured that I would lay hold of prosperity, happiness and peace as my divine right.

All of this was to me the crowning buffoonery in a tragicomedy being performed in the nation's capital of cultism, Los Angeles. Disillusioned, I packed the SRF letters, application blanks, horn of plenty and the Inner-Culture circulars in a bulging envelope and shipped them off to Kenneth with a terse note: "Is this Vedanta?"

His reply was punctual: "It's Vedanta 'American-style.' SRF is related in no way to Gerald Heard." The brief message was tucked inside a package containing two of Heard's books: *The Code of Christ* and *The Creed of Christ.*

For several days I lived with these books and there was only one way to describe my feelings. I was standing again in the vestibule of the "temple" on Ivar Avenue. The adventurous spirit of a modern mystic was successfully solving the puzzle of life. With remarkable insight and steady faith, he was walking through the world of thought and values, interpreting anew for our time the message of the Christ. The *Code* and the *Creed* brought the "spiral" to a majestic consummation. They described man's spiritual unfoldment through the progressive stages of cleansing, illumination and union. They guided me through the realms of justice, equity and love and pointed onward to the eternal reality of God.

So great was the influence of these books that I recommended them to several friends. Their opinions were varied: Heard makes the Master's teachings practical and timely. . . . Heard thinks cosmically and that is what frightens me. . . . Heard cannot be interpreted by anyone who has only a Christian theology. . . . Heard is one of the ablest thinkers of our time. . . . Heard is a mystic and only a mystic will understand him.

About this time a minister of my acquaintance, the pastor of an interdenominational church, came to me with one of the characteristic problems of his profession, the everlasting question which sincere workers in religion are bound to ask, "How can I get people to feel the vitality of religion in their lives as I feel it in mine?"

"There is a man who is able to do that," I said.

"What's his secret?"

"A great conviction," I answered. "A great experience somewhere in his background."

"All of which I feel *I* have" was the minister's earnest response. "But I still don't have the ability to inspire others." Sighing, he contemplated, "There must be some other technique."

"Someone called it 'the contagion of a triumphant spirit,'" I said. "Maybe that's what it is. Did you ever run into a man named Gerald Heard?"

"No, can't say that I did. Who's he?"

"When I heard him I put him down as a philosopher and theologian, but he is also a popular writer and lectured at Oxford as a historian. He was an announcer with the British Broadcasting Corporation, but he is also a biologist and an authority in the field of psychology. He is considered one of the world's foremost mystics."

"How does he do it?" asked the minister hopelessly.

"As I understand it, he had the idea that the way to come to terms with oneself is to take time out for meditation and the search for truth. He began to devote himself to the contemplative life and to philosophical studies. I have some of his books. Would you like to take these with you?" I offered him *The Code of Christ* and *The Creed of Christ.*

The minister took these copies with the comment,"Well, they're not very long. Let's see what he has to say."

I had no idea what his reaction would be, but a few days later he returned singing the praises of Gerald Heard. Thrilled with a new enthusiasm for the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, which the author spiritualized in his two publications, the minister told me he would use the books as a basis for a series of Sunday sermons. Later he supplied me with excerpts:

> The writings of Gerald Heard have given me a greater appreciation of God and His laws. He has put a new dynamic into my thinking and has delivered me from any fear of being compelled to choose between a slavish worship of the letter of the Word or a rejection of the Word altogether. He has given me a conception of "High Criticism" in the highest sense. His writings are full of that self-evident power so characteristic of spiritual truth and needing no argument from any other source.
>
> This man has the sort of mentality that would have made him

a success in any field. He chose to direct that mind into religion in order to find meaning and truth in life. What he has found for himself he is willing to share with others without sensation and without commercialization. He is an example of a "grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, and as a result brings forth much fruit." The remarkable thing to me is that with all his learning he still remains so fundamentally conservative from the Christian point of view. It is said that he is basically a Vedantist. I do not know just what this means, but if this is Vedanta then a little Vedanta will do us all a lot of good, especially if it helps us to develop ourselves into men without prejudice and with enthusiasm for the divinity of all men everywhere.

As far as modern Vedanta was concerned, I stood confused between Heard and Yogananda. The Vedanta of tradition was more understandable. Its interpreter—indeed the father of Vedanta—was the sage, Shankara, who lived in the eighth century. He was to the Upanishads what Paul was to the New Testament. His similes, doctrines and philosophical tenets became so much a part of Vedic lore that his words were often quoted as part of Hindu scripture. There was no more important name in Hindu history, no greater mind, no soul more profound than Shankara. He wrote his brilliant commentaries and they conquered Hindu thought. It was he who said, "The Self is through and through nothing but spirit, spiritual in its entire nature, as the salt taste is entire in a lump of salt."

Brahman became for Shankara the one true God, as the God of Jesus became the one true God for Paul. Brahman wanted nothing, needed nothing, sought nothing but the salvation of the individual soul which was His very own. That men might know this truth was the mission and ministry of Shankara.

There was no longer any question about Kenneth's disciple-ship. Somewhere along the way of the quest where I had met Shankara with the mind, he had met him with mind and heart. My evaluation of Kenneth's "inner experience" was mainly intuitive, although it was influenced by a number of letters which reached me in quick succession. They were mostly discourses on the right of religion to govern and direct man's total attitude toward life:

> It is not enough to define religion as that which keeps us from falling into evil, or that which tempts us to do only good. Religion is more than ritual or anything formalistic. It is something beyond a psychological experience. If it is anything at all, it is a man's total commitment in every area of experience. It is the supreme knowledge that we are one with God and that we should live as though this were true. God is life and life is God. We know Him through this awareness and in knowing Him we know ourselves.

In my concern about what was happening to Kenneth in his pilgrimage, I told myself that Vedanta could be appreciated only by people who had the time, as he did, for undisturbed study and meditation. He was shielded from the necessity of making a living, of finding his place in life, of gaining security. The responsibilities and concerns that beset most people were foreign to him. All of this he admitted, but he believed that by the conscious fixation of the mind on the "true Self," a mystical power could be generated which would master the seemingly unconquerable problems of life for anyone. Physical difficulties, material distresses, the woes and concerns of everyday living could all be solved in this laboratory of the spirit.

He contended that darkness and apprehension were illusions of the mind, as were also poverty and life's bad breaks. Fate had allotted to everyone something supremely good. The realization of this truth needed only the science of cognition through which the individual recognized his oneness with Brahman. True mystical experience was not dependent on one's station in life, one's advantages or one's bank account. It was dependent only on willingness and knowledge; willingness to integrate oneself with Divine Reality; knowledge that such a relationship is the highest truth. *True* perfection, he affirmed, could be eventually attained only by obeying Christ's injunction, "Sell what thou hast and give it to the poor."

Out of this conflux of Vedanta and Christianity came the conclusion that if one desired success, cosmic awareness would help in its attainment, but the awareness itself was infinitely better than any earthly success could possibly be. When a man rose to the point at which he could make God his Servitor, he desired God only as his object of adoration.

These were faint flickers of light in the still dark philosophical passage. When my friend wrote me that the Upanishads said "No" to self only to establish a more emphatic "Yes," I was not exactly certain just what it was all about. And when he insisted that the mystic was right who said, "Primal Love may be compared to Nothing, for it is deeper than any Thing, and is as nothing with respect to all things," I feared that Kenneth, in his plunge into mysticism, was going down for the third time.

For my special orientation I compiled my own Vedanta glossary:

1. Brahman: eternal principle of all being, the highest Self; identical with

2. Atman: soul, self, inner essence; unable to distinguish or disentangle itself from
3. Upadhis: limiting conditions such as the body and its sensations; which give rise to
4. Avidya: ignorance and illusion confusing the atman and tempting Self to believe that the limiting conditions are real until Self through
5. Vidya: truth, right cognition, knowledge, persuades the atman that upadhis is an illusion, avidya a deceiver, and Self and Brahman are one; the practice by which this relationship of "That art Thou" is achieved, is called
6. Yoga: yoke, contemplation, union, restraint of the senses, discipline; of which there are important forms, among them:
    a. Raja-yoga, techniques whereby the senses may be controlled and relieved of the objects of sense and by means of which the yogi (one who practices yoga) may enter a trancelike state or state of bliss or emancipation. Raja-yoga teaches that the external world is but the gross form of the internal. The internal world is the cause, the external the result. The raja-yogi seeks to control the laws of nature which now, in most instances control individuals.
    b. Bhakti-yoga directs to God through exercises and thought the love and passions which we normally direct toward objects and men. It seeks so to increase the devotion toward God that he (the yogi) is absorbed in God. It is an intensification of the love of God until all is lost in this intensification.
    c. Karma-yoga. Karma means work. It also means the law of causality, the belief that we reap as we sow. Karma-yoga is the doctrine and process of working for work's sake without any motive, ideal or reward. There are at least two ways to obtain release from the external world: meditation and the way of work. The first is possible to men of exceptional minds and gigantic wills; the second for the less qualified seekers.
    d. Jnana-yoga, the yoga of philosophy, intuition, knowledge, but the knowledge is spiritual. Intellect is subordinated to

intuition and dogma to experience. Through the proper techniques of bringing philosophy to bear upon spiritual union, it is possible through yoga to control

7. Prana, cosmic breathing. All nature and life is permeated by prana, and he who can control prana controls the universe. The mastery of prana is
8. Pranayama, control of the power of breathing. Through pranayama, miracles, or what appear as miracles, may be performed or realized. But there is no greater aim within Pranayama than to attain
9. Samadhi, union with the divine in which the yogi becomes aware of facts and experiences which no instinct or reason can ever know. It is in samadhi that he realizes his oneness with Brahman, and it is out of samadhi that he brings with him the telltale signs of illumination which are evidences that he has been identified with the Universal Soul.

The only way in which I could personalize this homemade lexicon was to relate it to Christian terms and Christian experiences. I attempted to convince myself that there was nothing in Vedanta which my religion did not have and nothing in the Upanishads which could not be found in the New Testament.

Admittedly I approached this correlation with a preconceived idea. After all, why substitute Brahman for "God" when God to the Christian is already the eternal principle of all being? Why put Krishna in the place of Christ? Was not the atman just another name for the soul? I believed—and nothing in my faith refuted it—that the soul was one with God as surely as the atman was one with Brahman. The Christian's soul, too, was unable to distinguish its true identity due to limiting conditions. It made no difference whether one called these conditions upadhis or physical man, ignorance or avidya.

Vidya, which Vedanta termed right cognition, was to me but another word for the Christian "spirit of truth." It was the relationship which Jesus defined as, "I and the Father are One," and that relationship was no different from "That art Thou."

And yoga? Was it not another word for Christian techniques of prayer, meditation, pietism, concentration, discipline? Prana? It was a system of overcoming the barrier between the devotee and the Absolute. Whether by control of breathing or some other characteristically mystical experience, it worked alike in Christian and Hindu. The saints and holy men of my tradition were witnesses that they, too, had seized on some cosmic force and were able to control it. And Samadhi was but the Christian's transcendental experience in which he "lost himself in God."

All religions were the same and all religious philosophies were paths to one goal: the realization of the immediate presence of God. Ideas and perceptions from every land and culture and creed, stages of mysticism as varied as the individuals who practiced them—what did it matter? They were all the same. The Upanishads declared, "He who is yonder, yonder person, I myself am he." The New Testament affirmed, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." So why did Kenneth Lawler believe that he had to forsake his own tradition and heritage to find the same truth elsewhere?

Months later I sought the answer to this question. From my hotel room in downtown Los Angeles I called Kenneth's apartment. There was no answer. Later when I again failed to reach him, I telephoned his uncle and was invited to his home with the remark, "Kenneth is in San Francisco until tomorrow. He said if you called you should come out to the house. He left something here for you to look over."

Mr. Lawler was a man of seventy, essentially practical, well-read, and with a sense of humor mellowed by his years. When the housekeeper ushered me into his luxurious den, he greeted me warmly and then, relaxing in a leather chair and reaching for his pipe, he said with pleasant tolerance, "You will notice that I am not sitting yogi-fashion. But I am not so sure about my nephew."

"Has he gone that far?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know. Pretty far, I guess. When was it you saw him last?"

"Almost two years ago."

"Oh, well, then you haven't seen Kenneth at all—the present Kenneth." He lighted his pipe and stretched himself comfortably, pulling his lounging robe around his thin legs. "Kenneth," he mused, "has at last found himself."

"Yes, I know."

"Oh, but you don't know," Mr. Lawler warned. "Even I don't know all about it. Here is a boy who never had an interest that appealed to him enough to let it interfere with his way of life. Now he has. He meditates and reads and whatever else goes with it. He calls it working from the inside out." The old man leaned back and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "The inside out." He looked at me with a smile. "Don't get the idea that I consider it meritorious for Kenneth to get up earlier than he used to. There is purpose in it. He calls it discipline. Discipline for what? To learn the meaning of Reality. That's why he fasts."

"Fasts?"

"One day a week" was the reply. "And that is why he denies himself pleasures and has become suddenly quite generous. Well, sir, if I thought that all this was a psychological quirk, I might be inclined to talk him out of it. But the fact of the matter is he's grown in his outlook on the world until he almost has me thinking about Reality and this inside-out idea."

I said, "I suppose everyone wonders at times about man's purpose in the world."

"That's right," said Mr. Lawler. "What is there to this God business that has covered the world with churches? If it's anything, it had better be *something*. Now my philosophy has always been quite simple. No one can harm us but ourselves. Sin is misdirected energy. There is no devil but fear, and the universe is good. But that isn't enough for Kenneth. He must have prescribed practices. He insists on finding Reality for himself through his own experience."

"Is he happy in all this?" I asked.

"Well, now, that's another thing. Whatever happiness is, I'm sure that, first of all, it's a state of mind. Comparing Kenneth now to what he was before he took up this new interest, I'd say he at least has some happy *purpose* which he didn't have before. Well, he'll need to work it out for himself. If he should come to me and say, 'Guess I'll give up everything and go to Tibet,' I'd say, 'Very well, Kenneth, it's your life. You're old enough to know what you want to do with it.' Or if he should say, 'I've decided this cosmic consciousness is not for me,' I'd say, 'All right, go back to the Presbyterians.' "

"You said there was something for me to look over?"

"Yes, up there on the mantel. Those three huge loose-leaf notebooks crammed full of lesson material. Take them into the library or out on the patio or wherever you wish. How about a cold drink?"

I accepted the invitation gratefully and appreciated the luncheon which went with it, for Yogananda's lessons on Self-Realization were long and involved, but fascinating. Yet, as I read them, I kept asking myself whether this was truly Vedanta. And if Kenneth had accepted and applied these teachings, he most certainly *had* changed.

For the *Praecepta* prepared by the paramhansa were a mixture of health culture, physical exercises, prayers, personality development, parables, poems, affirmations, hints on the rejuvenation of body and mind, explanations of scripture texts from the Vedas and the Bible, and recipes—recipes for Youth Cocktails, Youth Dishes, Youth Drinks and Summer Salads.

I could not imagine Kenneth Lawler washing 100 leaves of spinach, drying them with a cloth, browning them in 1/16 pound of butter and adding chopped garlic, ½ teaspoon of sugar and ¼ teaspoon of salt and stirring over a hot flame for five minutes before serving.

And I wondered whether my friend had derived sustenance from the paramhansa's heavenly manna: "You are a human chick living on the yolk of the world and surrounded by the star-studded blue shell of the sky"; or, "Every time you see sad faces, shoot a buckshot of vitalic-spreading smiles there"; or, "Grapefruit tonic is a wonderful flusher for the gall bladder and liver."

Was this religion? According to Yogananda good health meant good living and good living meant knowing God in every fiber and atom of one's being. The paramhansa put it this way: "The climbing spiritual aspirant must learn to conquer in order to make the Temple of Life free from the darkness of ignorance and the weakness of disease so that God's perfect Presence may be perceived. As a house full of jewels cannot be seen in the dark, so the presence of God cannot be felt while the darkness of ignorance, overpowering disease, or mental inharmony prevail."

The longer I studied these mimeographed lessons, the stronger became my conviction that the seeker for religious directives would find in these pages guideposts and techniques to help him in his quest for a fuller life. Perhaps the churches had neglected too long to provide a correspondence course in the "Knowledge of God" for members who felt they were not getting the most out of their religion. This is what Yogananda promised to supply in his extended studies in Self-Realization.

The *Praecepta* were well worked out with questions and references and a Yogananda bibliography. There was a practical and complete Order of Study for individual work or for group participation. For those who missed the element of corporate worship in their Protestant churches, the Self-Realization plan fulfilled a need.

The program called for an opening prayer. Then a time for correct posture and breathing exercises, all minutely described, followed by a prayer of the fellowship of faiths: "O Spirit, Saints of all religions, Spirit in our body temples, Jesus Christ, Supreme Master Babaji, Great Master Lahiri Mahasaya, Master Swami Sri Yukteswarji, Preceptor-Guru Swami Yogananda, I bow to you all. Free my life from all obstacles and give me material, mental and spiritual development."

Then came exercises for healing and suggested affirmations, leading into the chant of the cosmic sound, OM. The instructions called for starting this mystical expression, OM, loudly, gradually decreasing to a whisper and finally dissolving into a silent, mental chant.

Following the lesson material were additional affirmations and a suggested closing prayer: "Father, bless me that I may perceive Thee in all joyous activities. Mayest Thou look at me and cheer me always. . . . Let my every activity, waking, sleeping, dreaming, be lighted with Thy Presence. May Thy Love shine forever on the altar of my devotion, and may I be able to awaken Thy Love in all hearts."

I made my way through the nearly five hundred pages of lesson material, learning that the Self-Realization Fellowship consisted of two distinct parts: one, the creative writings of Yogananda; two, the "contribution of the ancient Sages of India, adapted for the use of western peoples."

The titles, swami (master) and paramhansa (divine one), had been conferred on Yogananda by a sage and mystic, Swami Sri Yukteswar Girigji, Maharaj of Bengal, who traced his own title through an unbroken line to Shankara. The order to which Yogananda belonged was described as Sat-Sanga, "The Fellowship with Truth." SRF's teachings were based on Yogoda, that which imparted harmony to "all the faculties and forces that operate for the perfection of mind, body, and soul." Yogananda, as the chief apostle of Yogoda, brought the teachings to America in 1920. Among his most cherished confidants was Luther Burbank, who endorsed the statement that his skill in controlling plant life was comparable to the power exercised by the paramhansa over the lives of men.

As I sat in the patio musing over the SRF course of study and wondering what influence Yogananda was having on the life of Kenneth Lawler, I looked up to see his uncle standing near me, calmly smoking his pipe.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It is certainly a new approach. Have you looked at any of this?"

"Heavens, no! I told Kenneth that I thought there ought to be a general clearinghouse where all these religious beliefs could be straightened out so that we ordinary people would know what it's all about. It's too deep for me" came the admission, "but, as I said, let him work it out for himself. I only hope he won't make religion a profession. To make a profession of religion degrades it."

I thought of this remark later in the afternoon when I drove up a long, winding road in search of a house number on San Rafael Avenue. I found it near the top of the hill printed in white letters on a grilled, blue-painted gate: 3880. The gate was open. I parked my car and walked up a road closed in by palms and yew trees and cultivated gardens. Some two hundred yards from the gate the road skirted the brink of the hill and led to an old mansion which, I learned later, had once been the fashionable Mt. Washington Hotel. It was dated as the "Mission Style" of the early 1900's, a huge three-story structure with a large cupola and red tile roof. The casual landscaping blended into a setting of shrubs and trees as if nature had been summoned by the paramhansa to help protect the sacred premises.

Upon ringing I was admitted by a middle-aged woman, fashionably dressed, who invited me into a spacious reception room. So as not to disturb three young men, who sat engrossed in their reading, she led me across the thick purple carpeting to a corner. Almost immediately a younger woman came in from another room and asked me my name and my reason for coming to the Mt. Washington Estates.

I introduced myself and said, "I have a tentative appointment with Paramhansa Yogananda."

"Yes, I remember," she said courteously. "As I told you over the telephone, the paramhansa has been in meditation for several days and has been seeing no one."

"I understand. You said he might be ending his meditation today and suggested that I could probably see him if I came over."

"Will you wait a moment, please?"

She hurried away and I had an opportunity to examine the room. It was dominated by a large picture of Yogananda similar to those used in his advertisements. There were two or three nondescript paintings on the walls, a piece of Rogers' statuary and two pianos. In a built-in bookshelf were worn religious volumes, sets of Shakespeare and Emerson, and slightly to one side, two novels by Sinclair Lewis. Over the large fireplace were inscribed the words: "Lead me from the Unreal to the Real. Lead me from Darkness to Light. Lead me from Death to Immortality."

On a chair, as if left by a student, were several copies of *East-West*. I was soon absorbed in them and found myself as silent and interested as the students. The *East-West* digest-size magazines were made up mostly of articles written by Yogananda with frequent excerpts from Luther Burbank, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Whitman, Emerson, Nietzche, Tennyson, Confucius, Shakespeare, the *Rubáiyát,* the Bible, the Vedas. These thoughts were correlated into metaphysical meditations designed for daily devotions. They were compelling. Yogananda's words held an inner passion which could not be lightly put aside: "O Man! Offer thy labyrinthian longings to a monotheistic bonfire dedicated to unparalleled God! Burn desire for human affection in aspiration for God alone, a love solitary because omnipresent! Throw faggots of ignorance to incandesce the blaze of insight! Devour all sorrows in sorrow for God's absence! Consume all regrets in meditative bliss!"

As if to warn me that this was more than just impractical enthusiasm spun on the wings of fanciful phrases, *East-West* reported the official opening of the Self-Realization World Colony at Encinitas, California. Pictures proved the magnificence of the seventy-foot "lotus-topped gateway" from which pure white walls with blue tipped parapets extended several hundred feet to enclose the seaside retreat fronting on the San Diego Highway. The dedication of the colony was amply described:

> More than 400 persons circled the main tower as Paramhansa Yogananda, founder, issued prayers for World peace to Jesus Christ and Indian masters. Mme. Amelita Galli-Curci, the prima donna, was mistress of ceremonies. The paramhansa, clad in a brilliant orange robe, first called on the assemblage to sing *The Star-Spangled Banner*. After prayers, he introduced guests of honor, including Ruth St. Denis, internationally-known dancer; Mrs. J. Darsie Lloyd, mother of Harold Lloyd, motion-picture comedian; Homer Samuels, husband of Mme. Galli-Curci, and various disciples and followers of Yogananda's teachings....
>
> As Mme. Galli-Curci prepared to pull the cord for the unveiling, she declared: "In the name of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Hindu saints and our own Paramhansa Yogananda, I open the SRF Golden World Colony."
>
> Following the unveiling the paramhansa placed leis of multicolored flowers around the necks of the celebrities and his disciples. The group then directed a tour of the grounds of the Golden World Colony, which Yogananda says is a model world colony to help abolish war. . . .

The paramhansa's secretary had quietly returned to the room. "Will you come with me, please?"

She escorted me to a penthouse room on the third floor and said, "If you will wait here, the paramhansa will see you."

The small, formal room was luxuriously furnished. Portraits of Hindu masters on the wall and the faint smell of incense provided an Oriental atmosphere, but all this was subordinated to the view framed by the picture windows. Like the cosmic breath of the mystic Vedas, the soft haze hung over the valley below, weaving together sky, earth and atmosphere. Never had I seen a more stupendous view. The luminous haze breathed on the Sierra Madres, touched the lower chapparal-covered hills and the softly nestled homes along the canyons; far in the distant west was the faint glitter where the sun broke through to touch the vast Pacific Here one could write of things immortal and sing the lyric of the Upanishads: "Brahma before, to right and to left; Brahma behind; Brahma stretched forth below and above; Brahma, indeed, is this whole world, this widest extent."

Later I was to wonder whether Yogananda deliberately contrived to let his visitors wait for him until their souls were emptied of self and filled with the power of beauty before he made his entrance, but for the moment I was spiritual possessor of the paramhansa's abode.

The door opened. I turned from the window to see a man who might have stepped from the pages of the Vedas, bearing in his quietly dynamic presence the mark of a contemplative. Sturdily built, somewhat below average height, with dark prophetic face, he stood in the center of the room and looked at me searchingly. His tired eyes filled with fatherly gentleness. Luxuriant black hair hung over his shoulders making him strikingly messianic. He wore a somber loose-fitting dark robe, and his hands were concealed in the folds of the full sleeves.

"Forgive me for keeping you waiting," he began and motioned me to a chair. He seated himself behind the table and folded his hands.

"I was very eager to meet you," I told him.

"You have not studied with us." His voice was stating an evident truth.

"No," I acknowledged, "I have not "

Secretly I was thinking, But I have seen your advertisements. The high-powered letters. The Horn of Plenty. I wanted to see for myself what kind of a man you are. You are older than your pictures, but admittedly remarkable in appearance. You may be forty or fifty or sixty, I cannot tell. There is something about you that is different, but, of course, it may simply be my characteristic attraction to people of other cultures. I remembered the words of Mr. Lawler: "To make a profession of religion degrades it."

Yogananda's eyes, partially closed, probed beyond my thoughts. "You are on a quest," he divined. "You are looking for truth."

Our eyes met and he continued in a voice that was almost a whisper, "The beauty and bliss of spiritual discovery you do not know. The sweetness of the inner life is what you seek."

For a moment his questions were definite and direct, "Your name again, please? Where is your home? What have been your religious experiences?"

His words called forth admissions in the manner of a confessional. Clearly he was accustomed to wearing the stole. Confident that I sensed his sincerity, he took me back through the labyrinth of my religious paths using my experiences as patterns on which to trace his own spiritualization.

He, too, had sought for the answer to questions beyond his grasp. Fortunately he had found a spiritual teacher, a guru, at whose feet he had attained a knowledge of Self. This master-disciple method was the technique which Yogananda himself had adopted since his coming to America. What was his place in the historical development of Vedanta? The blending of the teaching of the East with the Christian consciousness of the West. His emphasis was kriya-yoga, the scientific technique of God-realization through bodily discipline, right direction of life's energies, mental control and devices for finding Truth beyond the intellect. It was in the exercise of kriya-yoga that the student was instructed in the art of meditation on OM, the cosmic sound which an adept hears and recognizes in the silence, and which assures him that he is centered on the cosmic path. I had learned that OM is Sanskrit for God and it was this symbol which I had once seen on the portal of the chapel on Ivar Avenue.

But now the paramhansa was asking, "Do you know anything of yoga?"

"Nothing more than definitions," I confessed.

A sigh as of sorrow accompanied his words, "Definitions are not practices. To know about a thing is not the thing itself. Self is not truly identified with bodily desires and sensations. It is one with the superconscious force. Yoga extends the conscious realm beyond the limits of physical sensibility. It prepares one to receive and contact cosmic powers."

In a moment he was speaking as if in a trance, eyes partially closed, putting into understandable terms the basis of Vedanta teaching and interweaving quotations from the well-known sayings of Christ. Christ and Krishna were equally great. Immersed in introspection, he talked vividly of the sublimation of physical desires through the "Desire Supreme," of the attainment of self-realization, and of complete bliss as the final goal, intuitively experienced.

I found myself increasingly receptive. Think what I might about his methods of promoting his special type of Vedanta through the mails and in magazine advertisements, feel as I would about Mr. Lawler's complaint, Yogananda's elucidation of yogic principles was fascinating and sincere. At times his voice was so low that I lost both the words and the trend of his thoughts. At times he appeared completely lost in meditation. It was as if he were able to switch currents of repose and animation on and off at will, but quite independent of anything histrionic was a manifestation that persuaded me he had gone far beyond the average seeker in his quest for an understanding of the Unknown. Half-familiar words captivated me: "The true yogi, shorn of his ego-prison, tastes the deep air of omnipresence. In contrast, the thraldom of natural living is a humiliating wound."

In this vein he spoke of his views of the "inner life" to a "seeker after truth" and hoped that he was opening subliminal doors through which "the friend whom destiny had sent" might enter into a knowledge of consciousness "attuned to God."

When he had finished speaking he leaned back in his chair and looked at me as if to say that this had been quite enough for a first meeting. Then he rose to his feet and took from the table a paper sack which I had not noticed previously. He gave it to me with the words, "Please accept a little fruit from the bounty of the Mt. Washington estates. And you will come again, won't you?"

He held open the door and walked with me to the stairs where he remained standing with folded hands, nodding good-by. As I passed again through the reception room I saw the young men still absorbed in their books. The sound of a printing press rumbled somewhere in the old mansion. A new and shiny station wagon was parked under the porte-cochere. I walked out through the flower-scented grounds and made my way reflectively to the open gate.

On the following morning I met Kenneth in his apartment. His uncle was right: my friend had changed, although evidences of "conversion" were not discernible in any alteration in his appearance or surroundings. Meticulously dressed, fortified by his books and the luxury of his apartment, he greeted me with quiet reserve. Instinctively I asked myself, What is a man like this to be converted from or converted to? The question was answered as I talked with him and began to realize that there was a new confidence and a new assurance about him, the evidence of an inner experience.

I had always had the impression that he lived for the things he possessed. I now felt that he could live very well without them; at least he had put them into a proper perspective. Never before had he felt himself related to anything higher than himself, nor had he ever expressed any particular concern for others. I now learned that he divided his days into systematic periods for study and self-development, social service and a personal interest in the building of a religious colony in the vicinity of Santa Monica.

"Vedanta?" I asked.

"Not necessarily," he answered. "Just a group interested in a place for spiritual retreat."

"Connected with SRF?"

"No, not at all."

"I looked through the lessons," I told him. "Did they help you?"

"I didn't do much with them," he replied. "But there is a great deal of good in the course. Anything which will help convince anyone that 'the spirit of God is within you' is good."

"That's a major mission of Christianity," I reminded him.

He would not be drawn into a discussion. He was totally confident that he had found the faith he needed, that he was working at it step by step, and that it was working for him. Spiritual certainty is what he reflected as he sat studying me and apparently wondering whether there were any way in which he could make me aware that I was missing life's greatest adventure. I suppose he saw in me the atman, the divine spark, clouded by the smoke of too many beliefs when all that was needed was to believe that *That art Thou.*

"Do you practice yoga?" I asked.

"Of course," he answered. "It is the life of all belief."

"And how about Gerald Heard? Do you lean more toward his views than toward the teaching of Yogananda?"

"Yogananda," he said with a smile, "is Vedanta's Dale Carnegie. Gerald Heard is the true blending of the spiritual consciousness of East and West."

This was Kenneth's conviction. From the writings of Gerald Heard he had developed a positive system of religious belief.

Heard had harmonized the Vedanta of Ramakrishna with Christian doctrine and had clarified and deepened Kenneth's spiritual quest.

"I am not surprised," he confided, "that your interest in this has remained static. But I wish you would do two things: First, believe that physical perceptions do not afford direct contact with Reality. They are prejudiced by our wishes and desires. To become aware of Reality, vanquish the ego. Work toward this through periods of meditation. Revelations come in solitude. There is no better prayer than a soliloquy with God."

"And second?"

"Come with me to meet Mr. Heard."

"When?"

"Now. We'll take my car."

I tried not to betray my eagerness. When Kenneth drove south out of town, I asked casually, "Are we going to Encinitas and the SRF World Colony?"

"No," he said, "we're going to Trabuco."

When I showed no further curiosity, he told me that Gerald Heard was spending some time in seclusion in a retreat not far from Laguna Beach.

I had expected to see a cabin or hermitage in the Santa Ana Mountains. Instead I saw a magnificent pink-stone villa which might have been a hilltop estate or a monastery in the making, for there was a small white chapel set somewhat apart from the newly built stone dwellings. But there was only one man to greet us. Bronzed, casually dressed, looking no more than forty-five, Gerald Heard took Kenneth's hand warmly and, upon being introduced to me, commented that anyone with a name like mine should know something about music. Hardly waiting for my reply, he embarked on a discourse of the mystical and intellectual character of the compositions of Johann Sebastian Bach which might have come straight out of a critical biography.

He spoke with quiet intensity. From music he turned to philosophy, then to comparative religions. He listened with interest to my report on Trappist life and told me that, during mealtime here at Trabuco, Trappist silence was observed. He was grateful for my firsthand description of Quaker and Amish communities and spoke at length on mutualistic experiments and utopian ideals. From here he brought the conversation around to the Vedas and Vedanta. Kenneth listened with the devotion of a disciple toward his guru.

For more than an hour we walked through the magnificence of the Trabuco estate while our peripatetic friend presented an encyclopedic résumé of Vedantic history and belief. Quotations from the Bible and the Upanishads sparkled through his views of causality and natural law. From the Aryan invaders of Hindustan he drew his lessons, and in the parables of the Vedas he found beliefs to live by. Shankara lived again. The sages and the avatars walked with us. Seers and mystics accompanied us across the lovely grounds of this fabulous hermitage. Mr. Heard seemed to have this place all to himself, although he said that it had been built as a retreat for earnest seekers, pilgrims of the spiral stairs. Even the elevation was cosmically correct: 1200 feet above sea level was best for finding God.

Slowly our guide led us in the direction of the chapel. He was speaking of the value of prayer—the power terminal, the guide to the Real, cognition, of prayer breaking the tension between what we are and what we wish to become. Pity the man who never takes time to know himself, who never enters the inner chamber of divine consciousness, shutting the door of illusory thought and communing with God!

We reached the chapel and Mr. Heard invited us to go on in. Kenneth reverently removed his shoes and entered. Following the custom, I also went in. The hallway was dark as night. I took a few cautious steps. Groping my way, I encountered a heavy curtain. This was evidently hanging between the vestibule and the inner sanctum. I held it aside. Blackness was everywhere. I moved forward and felt the softness of a rug beneath my feet.

While I stood undecided, an almost imperceptible glow of light appeared in the dome of the room. It gave hardly any illumination, but somehow it helped me to realize that there were no pews or chairs in this awesome place. It made me conscious of the fact that Kenneth was seated on the floor yogi-fashion. I knelt beneath the halo of light and closed my eyes. The enfolding darkness molded my thoughts into solitude and compassionate peace. An inner voice seemed to say, "He who is yonder, yonder person, I am he." Then I remembered, "Beloved, now are ye the sons of God."

The world was silent. Time had no meaning. There was no conflict between the philosophy of Christ and Krishna and no quarrel between East and West.

CHAPTER IV

THE HUTTERITE

This story begins in a room on the third floor in the Hotel Marlborough, Winnipeg. It is six o'clock in the morning and I have been at my typewriter for nearly an hour. Near by on the table is a document: "The Case Against the Hutterian Brethren." On the bed memoranda and telegrams are scattered. Crumpled paper fills the wastebasket. Throughout the night I have been wrestling with a legislative question which would be asked me in a committee meeting at the Manitoba Statehouse in a few hours: "What do you think of the Hutterites? Are they antisocial? Are they a religious society or a communistic organization? Should they be permitted to buy more land in Manitoba?"

I thumbed through my notes. "Hutterians own 48,000 acres in Alberta, 14,000 in Manitoba. . . . A bill has been proposed to curtail land purchases." Among these papers was the telegram that had summoned me here, "Can you come at once to help represent us before the legislature? . . ."

A feeling of responsibility because of the privileges extended me by one of America's most insular religious groups brought me immediately to Winnipeg. My familiarity with Hutterian customs and my friendship with Hutterian John J. Maendel were the reasons for my being here. But what was I to say to the legislative committee? What *were* my honest impressions of Hutterian life? My first visit twelve years ago to the mother colony, Bon Homme, in southeastern South Dakota, had convinced me that the Hutterians dislike intrusion. If they had their way, they would keep the world out of their communes with the same authority that keeps their people in. Not because they wish to be unfriendly, but the failure of a hundred and twenty-eight similar communal experiments has taught them that there can be no compromise with the *Weltgeist,* the spirit of the world.

I had always been part of that spirit. The shiny car which I had driven into the sandy Bon Homme yard that summer day a dozen years ago was also part of it. My wrist watch, my radio, my necktie, a carton of cigarettes lying in the back seat were symbols of the godless world. Pastor Michael Waldner, aged seventy, white-bearded overseer of the South Dakota commune, had come out sternly from one of the chalk-block buildings and squinted at my personal possessions through his thick-lensed spectacles. "Your name, please?" he requested in crisp German.

I introduced myself.

"You heard about us how?" he wanted to know. "How, if you please?"

"Through a friend. He said you Hutterians had found the answer to the good life."

"Your friend became a Hutterite?" Before I could reply he answered for himself. "No, the world looks at us as it looks at one of its picture shows. To live our life, that is another matter."

He shooed a group of children away from the car. I never forgot the children. No visitor to a commune could ever forget them. They were the mark of colony growth, about seven to a family, shy but eager-eyed, rigorously disciplined, always inquisitive, particularly about strangers. Forbidden to have games, the boys learned how to work at an early age. The young girls, not allowed to have dolls, played mother to baby brothers and sisters. By the time a child reached teen age, he was thoroughly indoctrinated with the communal idea; girls at twenty seemed to have no other wish than to marry and raise their families in the Hutterian tradition.

"So you heard of us," Pastor Waldner mused, absently fastening a hook and eye on his black jacket. "This is your first visit to one of our colonies?"

It was my first; twelve years ago almost to the day, and even now I seemed to hear the pastor's voice as he said, "Well, you are here. Now what?"

I inquired if I might look around and then ask him some questions about the Hutterian system.

"The commune you can see," he told me, as if it were obvious that the world's people always intruded first and then asked permission.

I had only to walk around to get the feeling of his world. Bon Homme was an assortment of chalk-block homes and weather-beaten frame buildings standing on an elevation overlooking the Missouri River. One glance showed me that utility, not beauty, was the rule. Dirt paths connected the houses, and wagon roads led to a variety of shops and barns. The commune was a giant farming enterprise. The silos and cattle yards, the hog barn, the separator house, the apiaries, the orchards and gardens were part of the system. But the men and women going stolidly to their work were unlike the farmer folk in my world. They looked different. The men were bearded and wore black hats of the broad-brimmed preacher type. The women's long, full skirts swept the ground. Blue polka-dot kerchiefs covered their heads. Aloof and indifferent to my intrusion, they went obediently about their tasks. Theirs was the spirit of conservatism and old-worldlinesss. The spinning wheels at which the women worked were part of it. This was the sheltered Hutterian kingdom, and my car and I were invaders from the outside, emissaries of the *Weltgeist*.

Pastor Waldner studied me through his thick glasses and apparently saw in me what he wanted to know. He turned away to make his decision.

Finally he said, "You may come with me. We cannot help it if a bird flies over our head, but it is our fault if he builds a nest in our hair."

His face lost its seriousness as he said this, and chuckling wisely, he walked with solid steps to a small frame dwelling and invited me in. Sitting in the narrow hallway which separated the living quarters for two families, a young mother was nursing her child. In the somewhat darkened room an elderly woman sat at a spinning wheel in the deeply recessed window. I caught sight of gentle blue eyes and a round face that looked cherubic within the polka-dot head scarf tied under her chin.

All this came back to me now as a picture I remembered from the early days of my research. Mental photographs were all I had and the only kind the Hutterians ever allowed. I saw again the hasty, inquiring glance that passed from the woman to Herr Waldner. His casual demeanor implied that I was only a curiosity seeker; just another poor wanderer from the world.

There was no introduction. The pastor obviously assumed I should know that any woman in his *Stube* would be his wife, and he let it go at that. I followed him up a homemade ladder into his attic study. From a curtained bookshelf he selected two large worn volumes and brought them to an old desk near the small-paned window.

"If you want to know about us," he said, "here it is. Our history and our hymns tell the story."

This had been my introduction to the communal experimenters whom I was now being called on to defend; to defend or to condemn. Hutterian John J. Maendel was leaving that decision to me. He wanted me to be completely honest in my testimony about his people. John J. was a leader in the New Rosedale Colony near Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. During the years of my research he had been my counselor. It was he who taught me Hutterian songs and sayings and guided me in my contacts with the Canadian colonies. John J. trusted me, though he knew that his world and mine could never be reconciled.

Last night when he met me at the Winnipeg station he had made his position clear. "We wanted you to come because you know us," he explained. "You have always been fair with us. You know our work better perhaps than anyone else. Now there is bitterness against us. We are accused of many things. It looks like persecution again, but persecution for Hutterians is no new thing."

He was referring to Hutterian history when he said that. He was thinking of their founder, Jacob Hutter, from whom they took their name; Hutter who was burned at the stake in Germany in 1536 for refusing to bow to the German state. John

J. had in mind the bloody path of suffering and death of the Anabaptists, of whom the Hutterites were a part.

The Anabaptists were the reformers of the Reformation because they felt that Luther had not gone far enough. Demanding complete separation of church and state, renouncing the militarism of ecclesiastical leaders, they stood for nonresistance, for holiness and the simple life. They were called Anabaptists because they believed only in the baptism of adults and rebaptized those who had been baptized as infants.

One thing they had which no one could dispute—the largest book of martyrs in the kaleidoscopic history of the Christian faith. I had seen that book, *The Martyrs' Mirror,* in Pastor Waldner's attic study at Bon Homme.

I had examined other books, rare and treasured volumes, among them the *Geschict Buch der Hutterischen Brueder,* the *Story of the Hutterian Brethren.* From the pages of this volume I had looked out of the small-paned window and watched the pageantry of Hutterian life as it was being unfolded in the United States. The scene was not American. It had an old-world look. In Germany, Transylvania and Russia, Hutterians had lived and looked like this ever since the sixteenth century.

For more than four hundred years these people had kept themselves apart from the world, claiming they had found the secret of a better life. What had they found? What did they believe? How happy were they? These questions, too, I would be asked by representatives of a government trying to decide whether Hutterians should be restricted in a growth that had been steady, sometimes astonishing, since they first came to America in 1874.

For me this was a morning of great decision. Ten thousand

Canadian Hutterians and the members of some twenty colonies in the United States had a stake in what would happen at this legislative committee meeting. Their freedom and their future hung in the balance. A struggle of contradictions deep within me continued to bring Hutterian life into review. Outsiders called the system communistic.

John J. had explained it repeatedly as a community of goods patterned after the teaching of the apostolic church: "The early Christians had all things in common." Hutterians would never compromise on that issue. They sincerely believed that they were standing with the Lord on that text.

"Eight words, John," I would say, "and a great deal of scholarly research says that those words out of the second chapter of the Book of Acts really do not mean that all of the early Christians lived communally. Certainly not that *we* should. You can't take Scripture that literally."

"We live according to the teachings of Jesus," John would affirm authoritatively. "We believe this is one of the teachings. Take away our community of goods and you take away the basis of our living faith!"

Did I truly believe that communal living was prescribed by Scripture? Was the Hutterian way really an acceptable way of life? The questions kept reeling in my mind. There was the day I visited with a Hutterian while his young son sketched figures in the sand of the commune yard. The youngster's face had been inexpressibly joyful as he moved the crooked stick with deft, light strokes until he had created the figure of a running horse. Then in exuberance he added the outline of a boy.

"That's very good," I had complimented him.

The bearded Hutterian at my side had looked down. With eager eyes the young boy waited while the inexorable gaze of his parent viewed the work. Then the bearded man frowned. Abruptly he rubbed out the design with his shoe and quoted sternly, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . ."

Once we had talked of musical instruments, and I had asked what would be wrong in giving the children a chance to learn how to play.

"Wrong?" came the response. "If one child had an instrument, why should not every child have one? Pretty soon no one would want to work, everyone would want to play. And when instruments of the world come in, the songs of the Lord go out."

Later I had continued the talk about songs and music with another Hutterian. In a faraway tone he said, "I had a harmonica once . . ."

I might say to the committee, "Gentlemen, Hutterians are too strict. They repress the talents of their children. There is no cultural development in the communes and no realization of individualism."

But I could not make this charge. Because the moment I thought of the Hutterian attitude toward music, for example, I remembered the influence of their hymns, songs which had been handed down by oral tradition for four hundred years. Even the children had music, though it was not the music of "the world." Plain songs and Gregorian chants, antiphonal music and *a capella* singing in the rural areas of the American Midwest and in the Canadian provinces: these were the cultural contributions of the Hutterians. No commune day ended without a song. No commune evening began without the traditional hour at church.

Many times and in many communes I had wished that people of the world who sought a faith might have been with me. For at eveningtime, as the deepening shadows reach out to touch the closely huddled buildings, a solitary figure moves down the pathway that leads to the small white school building. The commune pastor, with two books clasped affectionately under his arm, is the signal for the observance of evensong. The chores are done. The men have put on their best black hook-and-eye jackets and black trousers; the women have covered their dresses with modestly colored aprons. Their head scarves look freshly ironed. The children have been groomed for churchtime.

We enter the schoolhouse. The bearded pastor is seated at a table up front. At his right are the men of the community, at his left the women. Children are in the front benches. The curtainless windows, the barren walls, the black hats hanging on the wall pegs affirm the Hutterian objection to whatever would tempt the mind away from the simple, sheltered life. Now the pastor opens the hymnal and intones the first line of a song.

"All the world is full of sorrow . . ."

At his last word, the worshipers repeat the line and melody in voices that are shouts of conquest against the *Weltgeist.*

"All the world is full of sorrow . . . "

Shrill soprano tones mingle with the harsh, guttural voices of the men. The wailing strains overpower the room. The women's voices become more piercing, the men's weave their doleful spell. Overlapping the final syllables, the pastor chants another line.

"All the world is fear and fright . . . "

Again comes the strident antiphon, "All the world is fear and fright . . . "

The pastor: "Only God can bring contentment . . ."

The people: "Only God can bring contentment."

The pastor: "Only God can give men light . . ."

The people: "Only God can give men light!"

One verse, five, ten, twelve: the entrancing pattern becomes a chorus of trumpets breaking down the walls of my world. Voices trample the night with their impassioned tones, as the stolid figures throb with an inward intensity, their eyes fixed on the slightly swaying body of their leader. In turn, one feels oneself at some ancient wailing wall or in the catacombs with the early Christians, persecuted but defiant, appeasing God through the sacrifice of song, avenging the devil for taking over rulership of the earth.

"Music? We have our music. The five hundred songs of faith—that is our music, and that is enough for anyone to learn in one lifetime . . ."

The clock in my hotel room sang its own monotonous litany, chiding me for my indecision. My problem was that I always saw both sides of a case. I knew what the three hundred provincial citizens had in mind when they had met in a mass meeting at Oakville and St. Eustache, Manitoba. I saw their side of the story when they accused the Hutterians of being unco-operative in civic affairs. They *were* unco-operative. They would not vote. They refused to hold public offices. They were not interested in public schools and gave no support to local churches or rural enterprises.

The resolutions passed at these anti-Hutterian meetings had brought on the legislative investigation in which I was now involved. Hutterian communes *were* growing. If they continued to buy land unrestrictedly they might gain control of an entire municipality. What if they should? They were excellent farmers and conserved the land. Their wealth and productivity stayed in the Manitoba province. They were scrupulously honest in their dealings. But their resentful neighbors confronted me with "Hutterians engage in slave labor. They refuse to pay their people." Theoretically that was true. Hutterian men received fifty cents a month; the women twenty-five. To people of the world such compensation was preposterous. To the Hutterian it was a token, reminding him of the complete uselessness of money as a private possession. He wanted no luxuries. Jewelry and ornamentation he disdained. Rarely, if ever, did a Hutterite leave the commune boundary. He had no interest in secular pleasure and money was a burden.

Once I spoke to a Hutterian woman who had saved five dollars and a half.

"And what should I do with all this money?" she asked.

"Isn't there anything you would like?" I marveled.

"Maybe a pair of factory-made shoes," she replied. Then thoughtfully she added, "But if I bought a pair, wouldn't the others want some, too? Then we'd sure have trouble. No, I will go to the colony shoemaker and he will make me a pair. Anyhow, they will be more comfortable and last longer."

And what did the black-bearded shoemaker have to say? "All right, Anna," he told her, tying on his leather apron and tilting back his black hat, "I make you a pair of shoes. I have your shoe last here on the rack. In the world you try on this shoe and that one and if someday it hurts your foot, then what? You go back to the store and they say, 'Too bad!' Here, if you need something, all you do is go to the right man and get it. Why does the world think it is so smart? You would think they would throw the whole thing over and say, 'Let's all be Hutterians!' Oh, well, simple things always confuse the wise. Money," he muttered, "is what the world thinks about most. Why don't they think about living? . . ."

Why did I always find myself on both sides of a question? Attorney for the defendant and the plaintiff! Never having been at a legislative meeting, I was sure I would be the most vacillating witness who had ever faced one of His Majesty's inquisitors.

"Well, sir, just where do you stand on this issue?"

"Have you come a thousand miles without making up your mind?"

"Mr. Speaker! Honorable sirs! With whom does this double-minded American cast his vote?"

Envisioning myself as the key witness, I went to the window. Winnipeg was waking and coming to life. Streetcars emptied their crowds onto the avenue. Commuters on bicycles pumped their way through the moving lines of traffic. In front of an office building a one-armed man set up an orange crate and laboriously arranged his display of flowers. Well-dressed men walked briskly on the street, ready prospects for newsboys now crying out the headlines of another day. Then I became conscious of the noises of the city: faraway factory whistles, a locomotive, a bicycle bell, the streetcar's clang, the metallic reverberations echoing the tones of the metropolis, blaring out their rhythm to the busy movement of the impersonal street below.

Vivid was the contrast of this scene with morning in the commune! There the first signs of life are the flocks of geese ambling in from the fields, shuffling through the damp sand of the yard, waiting for the "goose boss" to feed them. Dawn spreads across the colony acres greeted by the crowing of roosters, the bleating of sheep, the lowing of cattle. The "bell man" stretches himself and yawns as he makes his way to the scaffolding to ring the commune bell. The children appear—barefoot boys with patched pants, girls in long dresses. The resolute bearded men come from their homes to wash hastily in the basins on the house benches. Mothers work their magic with the smaller children at the homemade washstands inside the hallways.

Everywhere the unhurried commune drama begins as sunlight lifts the curtain on an old-world stage. The polka-dot head coverings are tied in place. A woman fills a laundry cart, puts the weight of her body against it and the two big wheels creak and wobble as she starts to the washhouse where the "laundry boss" will show her what to do. The "kitchen boss" has started fires in the huge old-fashioned stoves.

The scent of wood smoke and the familiar sound of "good mornings" were the recurring prologue to the orderly Hutterite days and introduced the commune scene as it was played for me many times through the years. The seasons changed only the setting; the drama remained the same. Always the "farm boss" met the householder quite by accident, but just in time to hold a conference on how to make the most of the new day. The "bee boss" always found the right boys to help him. The "carpenter boss" and the "machine-shop boss" and the "orchard boss" got their groups together with magical ease.

Everyone in the commune, man or woman, was a boss or would be one someday; but the boss of bosses was the pastor and he walked slowly up and down in front of his home, striding back and forth like a pendulum counting the moments until breakfast. . . .

Sure at last of what I felt I should say, I went to my typewriter.

REPORT FOR THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE

Gentlemen: In terms of uninterrupted history the Hutterian Brethren have the distinction of being the oldest communistic group in the Western world. For four centuries Hutterites in Germany, Russia, England, South America, Canada and the United States have existed as isolated pockets of Christian communal experimentation. Today they are stronger than at any other period in their existence. You are considering the enactment of a land act to curb the colonies in their attempt to expand in the province of Manitoba. In this connection I have come to some definite conclusions. . . .

The jangle of the telephone sounded louder than a commune bell. I picked up the receiver.

"Good morning" came the confident greeting. "This is John J. Are you ready for breakfast?"

"Well—" I hesitated— "I'd rather go later."

"I'll come right up, anyway" was the characteristic response, and the receiver clicked down.

A moment later John J. Maendel was at the door. His insistent knock was followed by the rattling of the doorknob. I let him in, realizing again how he carried the spirit of the commune wherever he went.

John was thirty-eight, a typical "colony boss," a man of great inner strength, completely confident of meeting every situation on its own terms and conquering it on his. Black hat squarely on his head, his brown beard more closely cropped than I had ever seen it, his strong stocky body clothed in a new hook-and-eye attire, John J. brought a Hutterian morning into the room. He greeted me with a determined nod and a *"Guten morgen, Herr Marcus,"* as his shrewd hazel eyes began poking busily around the room.

"This," he exclaimed, "must be the bridal suite. It's not like the hotel I stayed in last night. You would have felt out of place there and I out of place here. A man rides best in his own saddle."

He strode to the window, pushed his hat back over his heavy shock of dark hair, clamped his hands strongly behind his back and looked appraisingly into the street. "A man gets a good view of the world from here," he observed. "You know, there is a saying, 'Walk always among the lame and you will soon limp.' Now just compare that life down there to our life."

"I have," I answered.

He seemed not to hear. "Rush and hurry and push and shove and 'nobody is going to get ahead of me!' " he reported. "One pulling this way and one that. Why don't they try pulling together? I sometimes wonder what the Lord must think. He made it *so plain* that men should live together, but they don't. *My* car, *my* house, *my* bicycle, *my* money, mine, mine, mine! That's the way it is with countries, too. *Our* land, *our* possessions, *our* trade lines, all ours! Well, let's go and eat."

I got ready to go. For the first time John J. noticed the papers and documents scattered over the bed. "What's this?" he wanted to know. "Didn't you sleep last night?"

"Sure I slept. But if I'm reporting to a committee, I want to know what's been going on."

"That I can tell you!" he cried, with a wave of his hand. "The whole plan is simply to embarrass the Hutterites and to discourage us and even to try to drive us out. And why? Because we have the best way of life. You know that as well as I do. No government needs to help us. Our people are never on relief. We have everything we want. We need no jail buildings. We have no divorces. We have no venereal diseases. We have none of the evils you find in the world."

He confronted me with vigorous conviction.

"So what happens?" he went on. "Our enemies say that we are getting a monopoly on land. That is the only fault they can find in us. No, there is one other objection. They say we enslave our people, especially our children. But the truth of the matter, as you should know, is that the colonies are really the greatest place in all the world for kids to grow up. We have no juvenile delinquency. Our children know the difference between right and wrong. They learn to know God. They are self-sufficient. And they have a good time. The word utopia is not too strong to use for our colonies.

"Our accusers say we have no security. What do they mean? We have security from the cradle to the grave. You want to know what is going on? Jealousy, that's what it is. Jealousy among the people of the world because they know that we Hutterites have the best life. You told me yourself how much you were impressed with it."

"I once inquired what I had to do to join the colonies," I said.

"Yes? When was that?"

"Some years ago I asked Pastor Waldner of the Bon Homme Colony what I would have to do to become a Hutterite."

"What did he say?"

"'That is very simple,' he told me. 'All you need do is to desire honestly our way of life. When you are assured in your heart of that, come and give up your possessions. These will be put into the common purse. You then adopt our customs and live as we do.' "

"I am sure," John maintained, "he also told you to surrender yourself to the Lord and His church. Our life is a religious life. That is what some people seem to forget."

"Yes, I knew that."

"But, of course," John said imperiously, "you never did anything about it."

"I asked him what I would get in return for joining the colony," I went on.

"Naturally!" John cried with a laugh. "What will you get out of it? That is a big question in the world."

"Pastor Waldner said, 'You will get everything you are working for now. And what is that? Security? We Hutterians,' he assured me, 'have always had that. Friends? In the commune you can trust everyone. Meaning in life? Is there any greater meaning than living the will of God? This is His will,' the pastor said, 'for He plainly states that His people should have all things in common. And when you die you will be buried in the little colony cemetery and your soul will go to God, for God loves the Hutterians.' "

"Good!" John affirmed with a vigorous nod of his head. "He told you the truth there."

"Then," I said, "I asked Pastor Waldner if I would have to give up my wrist watch and my automobile."

"Well?"

"He said, 'Why not? What do you want with a watch? We've got the colony bell. What do you want with your automobile? You're not going anywhere.' "

"And he was right," John murmured. "Life isn't measured in distances or in going places."

"But one day Pastor Waldner went somewhere with me," I informed him.

"Yes?"

"We visited the Rockport Colony near Alexandria, South Dakota.

" 'How fast are you traveling?' the pastor asked me.

" 'About fifty. What speed do you like?'

" 'That I don't know,' he answered. 'The faster a man goes, the less he sees, but the sooner he gets where he wants to go.' "

"Well, that's right, isn't it?" John said. "But just now, if you're ready, let's go and eat."

In the fashionable coffee shop people looked at us as if trying to figure out the connection between the smooth-shaven American and the stalwart bearded man in his tieless shirt. A few days ago the *Winnipeg Free Press* had carried a story on the Rosedale Colony and John J.'s picture was prominently posted in a full-page montage of Hutterian life.

"By the way, John," I remarked, "it surprised me to see that photograph of you, knowing that Hutterians don't believe in having pictures taken."

"We don't believe in pictures," John J. asserted emphatically, "but if the public thinks we Hutterites have horns, somebody had better let them know that we haven't."

"I've often wanted to take pictures of the colonies, but I was too polite to ask. Now, if you have started to let yourself be photographed, I'll have to bring my camera to the colony on my next trip."

John J. studied me a moment and his eyes twinkled. "Oh, so," he said shrewdly, "you think if the world gets us to say *A* it will get us to say *B,* too."

"Yes, John," I replied frankly, "that is exactly what I think."

"Elucidate, if you please," he ordered, giving the word a disdainful accent, as if he were borrowing it from a government investigator.

"Some years ago the colonies said *A* by putting in electricity. Then they said *B* and put in a telephone. And *C* by buying modern farm machinery, and *D* by introducing a truck. And *E,"* I added, laughing at John's consternation, "will probably be radios."

"Radios are something altogether different," he affirmed. "Radios are not to be compared to necessities. I go so far as to say that any labor-saving device is acceptable."

"Well," I exclaimed, "that sounds as if things are changing among the Hutterian Brethren!"

"You want us to farm with a hand plow?" he snapped. "Do you think we can compete without a farm truck or farm machinery?"

"Are you competing?" I prodded.

"It certainly beats all," he demurred with a vigorous shake of his head. "If we don't have modern improvements, we are accused of living in the Middle Ages, and if we get a few of life's necessities we are becoming worldly."

"Exactly," I agreed. "And that is your dilemma."

"We have no dilemmas," he retorted. "Not one of the things you mentioned is being used for pleasure, and that is the test. But how did we get off onto this? What I want to know is how you stand on the question before the house?"

"The government's attempt to put through a land act? I'm against it."

"How could anybody be for it?" he wanted to know, but his relief was apparent.

For a while we ate in silence and I reconstructed in my mind the first time, long ago, when I had eaten with John J. in the commune. Possessively he had taken me into the bare, austere refectory, where the homemade wooden tables, the backless benches, the plain dinnerware reminded me of the Trappist monks. Almost a monastic silence prevailed after I had squeezed in between two bearded men. They bowed their heads over their clasped hands. One man prayed. On the other side of the room, kerchief-covered heads were also reverently lowered. Then the food was served family-style in generous portions. Giant slices of bread, cut from the three-pound colony loaves, were on boards within easy reach. Honey and mustard and butter were in pint jars from which everyone helped himself. There was never any of the customary, "Would you care for some of this?" The food was in open bowls and everyone pitched in. At the head of the table stood the "coffee woman," filling the large cups from a steaming kettle and passing them down the line of hungry men. Meals were always eaten communally. No one but the pastor had his meal in his own home.

Many times when I had eaten with the community I felt a sense of remoteness from the world and wondered what was really going on behind the dark and somber countenances of people who lived constantly in such close family relationship.

A more impersonal group I had never seen, but mealtime was always an adventure and always closed amid a compulsory silence and the familiar, barely audible prayer: "We thank Thee, God, for meat and drink and all Thy bounteous kindness and Thy care. Amen." Then, noisily the benches had been pushed back. Vigorously the men snatched their black hats from the wall pegs and stalked out. Everyone made his separate, unhurried way to his appointed work as if believing that the good of all was best for one. . . .

John's voice brought me back to the coffee shop at the Marlborough. "The issue," he said, "is simply this. The complainers say that a young Canadian who returned from the war wanted to buy a farm. The landowner would not sell it to him because he was holding the land for the Hutterites. That is what started it all. But we do not want to buy land in such circumstances. All we want is a chance to live our lives. Our system is ordained by God. Canada will be the loser if we move on."

"I agree," I told him. "Many Canadians have expressed that same view to me. They feel that you have contributed a great deal to the development of the areas in which you live. The communes have taken abandoned farms and built them up. Others have told me they consider you Hutterians symbols of Christian faith and that they admire you for your ideals and for your courage to live them. I am sure there are also people who envy you for the security of the way of life which you enjoy. We all get fed up with the world's system at times. We all wonder whether some group might possibly have found a better social and economic order."

"Stop wondering," said John. "We have found it."

"The big question is this, can your system or any other system withstand the impact of the world or will it go the way of the hundred and twenty-nine groups who have tried an experiment similar to yours?"

"Experiment!" he cried incredulously in a voice that drew attention from other tables in the coffee shop. "How long must a person prove a thing?"

"I am only asking for information," I said patiently. "For example, I saw a news item about the colony school system. I want to say something about the schools to the committee, so naturally I am interested in reviewing the situation. You still have the *Kleine Schule,* the little school, where the children from two years to five learn the Hutterian beliefs?"

"Naturally! And if you mean we indoctrinate them there, that's right, too. Then we have the regular school supervised by the provincial department of education. This school fills the government requirements for grades from one to eight."

"But teachers for this school," I pointed out, "must be brought in from the world, and you usually try to get a Mennonite or a Quaker or someone who is in sympathy with some of your basic principles."

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

"The news story says that in the future teachers for this school may come from *within* the colony itself."

"That's good, isn't it?"

"I'm all for it," I answered. "But it means that whoever becomes the teacher will have to study out in the world."

"Or maybe take correspondence courses," said John J. knowingly.

"Perhaps so. What I'm getting at, John, is that this is another step toward——"

"—toward what?" he cut in defiantly.

"Toward the slow, sure process of assimilation."

"Assimilation!" he echoed contemptuously. "When the fox starts preaching, lock up your hens!" Then in a tone of deep affection he said, "My dear friend, I thought you knew us better than this."

His voice, his manner were disarming. There had been times in the past when I had looked wistfully at the complete integration of John J. and his brethren. The determining factors in my life—getting on in the world, goals, achievements—were unknown to them. Pride, envy and inequality which were part of my culture seemed never to have intruded into theirs. In a quiet rejection of the values by which I measured success, they had found the ideal of the collective system, the sovereignty of the group. Did John J. and the others firmly believe that their way of life could be continued in the face of the overwhelming encroachment of the *Weltgeist?*

"You know, John," I said, "by a twist of fate you might have been a businessman right here in Winnipeg. The accident of birth made you a Hutterite. You probably would never have joined the colony if you hadn't been born in it."

"That was the Lord's work, not mine," he pointed out. "He did me a favor, then, by letting me be born in a good place."

"What I mean to say is this. You are wise and you are inventive. Those soldering irons you make at the colony and the patents you hold on honey scrapers prove that you would have been successful in any system. Now your ideas make money only for the colony. Your talents must be confined to the commune and your children can go no farther than you have gone. Haven't you ever wanted to match wits with the world?"

Somberly John replied, "Long ago a great Man said, 'Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.' My treasure is with the Hutterians. When you can show me something better, let me know."

"And you don't think the communes are changing?"

"They are not! The world is accusing us, but we know that 'he who has God for his friend must always have the world for his enemy.' "

This was Hutterian belief, an integral part of commune consciousness. None of those who lived under the colony system expected any favors from the world. When John pushed back his chair and started from the coffee shop, I saw in him a man who had studied the "world" only for the purpose of meeting its cunning with Hutterian wisdom and weighing its practices against sound Anabaptist tradition.

"I will see you soon at the meeting," he said. "Many of the brethren will be on hand to hear what you have to say."

He paid the check with colony money and hurried away.

I returned to my room. Again I went over Hutterian reports and press releases. Persistently the thought returned: the commune and the *Weltgeist* are nearing their Armageddon. I felt it when I caught sight of the full page of photographs. I saw it again in the Hutterian stories. Between the typed lines of my committee report the realization loomed large and sure: the communes can no longer hold back their destiny. The world is at their gates, the spirit of the world has begun its work of infiltration. What was it an old Hutterian had told me? "Where the rabbits come in, the foxes will follow."

I continued my report feeling that I was estranging myself from those whom I admired and wanted to help, wondering about my future relationship with my friends the Hutterians.

Would there still be meetings after churchtime as there had been on so many occasions in the past; nights when the men and boys of the commune crowded the room of the "colony boss" to exchange ideas with me or to hear about other religious groups which to them seemed strangely interesting?

I suppose I was the first to introduce them to the history and life of the Doukhobors and the Snake Handlers, to the kingdoms of Father Divine and the work of Daddy Grace and many more. Their incredulity as they listened was marvelous; their complete objectivity, startling. "Think of it, think of it!" they would say, shaking their heads in astonishment. "Think of people believing things like that!" All altars were strange but their own.

Unforgettable was the spirit of belonging, the feeling that I was one of the commune. Many were the times that the bearded men had affectionately shaken my hand or given me a kiss of fellowship. Whenever I went away from a commune, my car was loaded with vegetables and fruit. A pail or two of Hutterian honey was usually included, together with a bag of Hutterian flour, a slab of bacon and jars of saskatoons. Once in a while, before I left, there would be a Hutterian going-away song, an *Abschiedslied.*

Though Lot and Abraham parted,
Their love remained the same;
Their hearts still held their friendship,
In peace and in God's name.

Thus let us live in love and faith,
And quit ourselves like men;
And hold to God's commandment,
Until we meet again.

Then the open gate and the open road . . . A glance backward would show me the waving hands of children, the closely clustered groups of women, the staunch, imperturbable bearded men and the pastor who seemed already to be saying to them, "Come, come, this is no holiday." The miles were always slow in getting the commune out of my mind. Once at the Rockport Colony in South Dakota, I recorded for the first time the age-old hymns of the Hutterites. Later a Canadian commune gave me permission to make recordings of interviews and songs.

"Isn't this worldly?" one Hutterian had asked another.

The answer was a Hutterian justification: "The Bible doesn't say anything against it."

Thoughtfully came another response: "No, it doesn't. But somehow it still doesn't seem right."

"Wait until you hear it" had been the final decision.

When I played back the songs there had been a moment of mingled laughter and chiding. Then the colonists grew silent. Awed by the miracle of the machine, one of the elders remarked, "Someday our children and their children will hear this. But just think how wonderful it would be if we could hear the voices of *our* fathers."

One day while I was making these recordings John Maendel's son had come running to him in tears. "David hit me!" he cried.

His father looked at him dispassionately. "How hard did he hit you?" he asked.

"Awfully hard," sobbed his son.

John extended his arm and said, "Show me. Hit me."

The boy hit his father sharply.

"Oh, he hit you harder than that," said John. "Hit me again."

Once more the boy struck him.

"Surely harder than that. Here, once more!"

Through his tears, the youngster had looked at his father. Ashamed, he stopped his crying. "He never hit me nearly that hard, John father. He never hit me nearly that hard at all . . ." His voice trailed off. . . .

The thought of this incident stayed in my mind while I finished my report. Chiding myself for my sentimentality, I felt that I, too, was about to hear John say to me, "How hard will *you* hit me?"

It was now nine-thirty. I went to the lobby to meet Philip C. Locke, capable attorney for the Hutterians in the present controversy. We walked together to the legislative building. In the corridor on the second floor John Maendel was waiting with a group of bearded Hutterians eager to greet me.

"Good that you are here," they welcomed me in German. "You are to speak first, they tell us."

John said stoutly, "First or last, what's the difference? It is *what* he says that counts."

Provincial farmers, townspeople, reporters and Hutterites now entered the hearing room. I was introduced to the three members of the legislative committee and sat with them facing the crowded chamber. The Hutterian delegation had grown to nearly forty members and they took their places in the section at my right. That was typical of churchtime at the commune. So was the hush that hung over the room when the distinguished committee chairman, John Lawrie, arose to open this session of the hearing. "Fairness" was his keynote. Testimonies had been presented, he explained, at previous hearings, and he emphasized that it had been shown there was no desire to curb anyone's liberty or restrict anyone's freedom to worship. The government had other interests. It wanted to know whether Hutterians themselves restricted the freedom of their constituents. Did the communes contribute to a low standard of living? Should they be permitted to expand?

"As far as this investigation is concerned," the chairman explained, "we want to determine whether there are constitutional provisions which allow the operation and continuance of a system such as the Hutterians represent. If they are imposing enforced labor and if some of their people desire to leave the colony and are refused money to assist them, these are matters of major importance."

My Hutterian friends remained dispassionate during the opening statements. Apparently they were weighing the chairman's words against their conception of truth. I could almost hear them say, "Who wants to leave the colony? The gates are not locked. There is no wall around us. And as for money, we give up all we have willingly. No one is forced to become a member of our society even if he is born into the colony life. When a person reaches an age of accountability he may decide for himself whether he wants to stay or leave."

As I watched these men Scripture texts flashed through my mind: "Be ye in the world but not of it. . . . Thou shalt be unto me a peculiar people. . . . Thou shalt not touch a razor to the corners of the face. . . . I have called thee to be a sign unto the nations. . . ."

True, they were being compelled to sit under judgment here in this crowded room, but what was that compared to the sufferings of their brethren whose names were inscribed in the *Martyrs' Mirror?* Who among them had expected to remain unchallenged by the world? Persecution was a true sign following those who believed. They had a saying: "If you are the anvil instead of the hammer, you must expect to be struck."

And now they turned their eyes in my direction. The chairman was introducing me as "one who has studied the commune life and who may have something to contribute to our present problem. . . ."

I caught sight of John Maendel sitting squarely, hands on his knees waiting for me to speak. A stir of anticipation moved through the Hutterian "bosses." The older men looked at me with fatherly affection. There was a moment of nearness that made my formal introduction stilted and impersonal. "Gentlemen: In terms of uninterrupted history the Hutterian Brethren have the distinction of being the oldest communistic group in the Western world." The words were lifeless. ". . . you are considering the enactment of a land act. . . ." That was not what my thoughts were saying. ". . . the founders of this Brotherhood were Swiss Brethren refugees, the so-called Anabaptists. . . ." The words were in my way. Who cared about Hutterian history? Anyone could read that in the books of religious history. Impatiently I pushed the typewritten pages aside.

"These men and their colonies represent what they believe to be the extension of the apostolic church," I said. "Their practice of a community of goods is part of their faith. It *is* their faith. They are not slaves. They call themselves freemen under a religious law. They live by this law, and I believe that many would be willing to die for it."

I heard myself pleading for understanding and for the rejection of any plan to limit or curb Hutterian growth. As I did so, I felt the temper of the opposition as it clashed violently with the unvoiced approval of the bearded men. In the crosscurrent of feeling I recounted what I believed to be the cultural contribution of the colonies: the classical tradition of their faith and their hymns, the writings and teachings of their founders, their spiritual approach to a healthy, adjusted life. Did they not have a right to live out their convictions, strange as they might seem? Were not all forms of worship and ritual strange to the uninitiated? I contended that they had found something in the way of a simple, reflective faith which we of the world had lost. I recounted some of my Hutterian experiences.

The audience sat hushed. The committee members were respectfully attentive. Gratefully the Hutterians watched and listened as I championed their cause. But all the while I knew that my sentiment was building a case which the logic of my research would have to destroy. Every friendly glance made my situation more difficult. Every nod of understanding only deepened my apprehension. I felt as if I were deliberately drawing a design for treachery.

"Do not legislate against the communes," I said gropingly. "If the Hutterites are treated with understanding and respect they will soon be assimilated."

The words were spoken, never to be recalled.

I saw John Maendel straighten in his chair. His eyes were fixed. He was looking beyond me into space. I caught sight of other bearded faces. They looked suddenly tired, strained, stunned with the pain of world-weariness. Brows were furrowed. Aged eyes filled with hurt; confusion and disillusionment were written in the glances that moved from me to the members of the committee.

Skepticism was the answer that came from the opposition as I stood interrupted by the entangled moods. John shifted in his chair. He folded his arms across his black jacket. Imperviously he looked at me with a glance that challenged, "Hit me again, my friend. Harder, please!" Then a smile crossed his face and he chuckled softly to himself.

The anomaly was heartening. At least I knew what John was thinking: "Assimilated? What a joke! We will be living our communal life long after the *Weltgeist* has destroyed the nations of the earth!"

"This investigation," I went on, "is not really concerned with land acts and slave clauses. It is basically interested in learning whether or not Hutterians will ever become Canadianized. I think they will. But persecution and legislation won't hurry things. When groups are discriminated against they become unfortunate minority problems. Tolerant practices bring groups into society and hasten the assimilative process. In the States we have seen communal attempts fail more than a hundred and twenty-eight times. The Shakers, the Perfectionists, the Zoarites, the Harmonists and scores of others felt they had found a better system, but they are gone.

"In Iowa we had a remarkable group known as the Amanas. They built seven villages and once owned nearly thirty thousand acres of land. They lived the way the Hutterites live. They had a community of goods. They ate in common refectories, they farmed together, they kept themselves separate from the world. They based their life on a religious idea just as the Hutterites do. That was the heart of their system. Today they are seven Iowa communities completely assimilated, completely absorbed."

I hurried on, driven by the growing restlessness among my Hutterian friends. They knew about the Amanas.

"All of our utopian seekers are assimilated," I contended, "all hundred and twenty-eight of them—all but the Hutterians. I love the Hutterites and I respect their ideals, but I do not believe that they can hold back the world any longer. I say this even though I have walked the streets of Amana with a Hutterian and he said, 'This will never happen to us.' But it is happening. Why? For good or ill there is a spirit in the world which is so strong that no one can subjugate it. Some call it the *Weltgeist*. Others call it the American way. But whatever it is, we know that no fence can keep it out, no wall can hold it back, no commune boundary can say, 'You shall not pass.'"

There were questions from the floor. The opposition wanted to know the reasons for my conclusions. I told them again how the colonies had changed within the past ten years. I was asked by the committeemen for recommendations. I suggested four: an improved school curriculum, tolerance and understanding of the Hutterian religion, participation by the Hutterians in provincial and national elections, rejection of the proposed land act.

But this was only giving expression to my prepared plans. The current of feeling that came from the black-jacketed men meant more to me than anything legalistic. There was a bond between us which had been broken, a confidence which had been lost. They looked at me as if I were a stranger, someone who had to start all over again to gain their good will. They had a proverb, "He who has been shut out of the main gate must knock at the side entrance."

"Everybody has the right to make one big mistake in his life," was the gist of John's opinion when he met me after the meeting. "This is yours. It is really a big mistake to think that we shall ever be swallowed up by the world. Thank you, dear Marcus, for all you have done and said in our defense. It was kind of you. But if you expect us to change our schools and if you think we should take part in national affairs, then, of course, you are only leading us closer to your expectation. I suppose one way of making prophecy come true is to predict a thing and then make it happen. But it will not happen this time. We are rooted and grounded in our faith and on that faith we stand."

But here and there among the men there was a word, a hint, a quiet observation.

"The young people are different from the way they used to be. They do not work as we worked. They are more difficult to discipline. They do not see how precious our faith is and at what cost it was bought."

"Sometimes," said another, "I think that we are today like the world was fifty years ago. Later we will be like the world was twenty-five years ago. Later still we will be like the world is today. We are like the world, only we are later in time."

What would the legislative committee do? What would be the outcome of their investigations and their hearings? John said he would let me know. He and another Hutterian went with me to the railroad station on the afternoon of my departure from Winnipeg. We shook hands. We said, *"Auf Wiedersehen,"* although I had no idea whether I would ever see him again.

Who was right, he or I, in our prediction about the future and the fate of the Hutterians? Could their communal living, isolation, discipline, renunciation of luxuries and commitment to eight words of Scripture withstand the devouring onslaught of the *Weltgeist?* Or had these untutored and "peculiar" people actually found the secret of the good life?

There was an incident I should, perhaps, have related to the committee. It occurred one day when three Hutterians stopped at my Iowa City home. They were the only men who actually left the commune for any distance, their assignment being a trip from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, to the state of Mississippi to get a load of bees. While the colonies rigorously opposed automobiles, trucks were permitted as necessary evils, and it was in a huge, canvas-covered van that the "bee men" transported their delicate cargo. During their brief stopover with me I invited one of the men to the university where I was conducting a class in a study of contemporary religious movements. He surprised me by his willingness to go.

The nearly two hundred members of my class sat interested and expectant as the bearded young Hutterian accompanied me to the platform. Some snickered at his hook-and-eye jacket and his homespun pants. His homemade shoes clomped righteously as he strode with me to the lectern. I invited him to speak. Thoughtfully he laid aside his broad-brimmed preacher's hat; somberly his brown eyes strayed over the crowded room.

"You students," he said in an honest voice, "must have a hard time living the good life. Think of all the temptations you have and all the time and the money you have to get you into trouble. I hear that in colleges most young people smoke and drink and go to dances and to movies. You must have an awfully hard time being good. But think how easy it is for us. We have the fence around our place and the world can't get in. It is difficult for you. It is easy for us."

The longer he spoke the more respectful my students became.

Not that they were so unrealistic as to believe that fences could keep temptation out of their lives; not that they were so naïve as to suppose that here was the perfect man, but the oversecularization of their world was something they understood. He went on to explain that by fences he meant not only wires and walls, but the religious concepts which bound the Hutterians into a closely knit spiritual community. He was completely sincere, entirely committed to the Christian communal ideal. He coveted none of the advantages which my students enjoyed. He saw in us a covenant with the *Weltgeist* from which we could never escape, and the students were impressed. So was I.

Weeks later a letter came from John J. stuffed with newspaper clippings. The Manitoba government had dropped its investigation of the Hutterites insofar as the land act was concerned. The committee had contented itself with making several recommendations bearing on the curriculum for Hutterian schools and suggesting amendments in the colony corporation acts to conform to Manitoba statutes wherever such acts had previously conflicted.

"Thank you," wrote John J., "for your help to us. But the Hutterite people are blaming you for the proposed change in the school curriculum. I trust that the change will not be to such an extent that it will embarrass the Hutterites. . . ."

After a lapse of several months the Hutterians again came into the news. In Alberta several communes, rebelling against growing pressure from the provincial authorities, moved back to South Dakota. In South Dakota a group of farmers marched on the capitol at Pierre protesting the sale of land to a Hutterite colony. "HUTTERITES EXPLORE POSSIBLE FARMLAND IN MEXICO," said a headline. "A delegation of twenty Hutterite leaders is in Mexico conferring with authorities on possible migration to that country and inspecting lands available for settlement."

The *Christian Science Monitor* carried the story with this inclusion:

> There are signs of restlessness among the young people of the colonies clustered around this city (Lethbridge) and scattered south to the United States border. One young colony member put it this way, "The main reason our preachers are talking about moving away from Alberta is because the younger Hutterites are becoming modern-minded and getting too many ideas like other people living around us. Our preachers say this is evil and leads to sin. They would like to move to a place where, they say, temptations would not be so great."

A reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune* toured the South Dakota *Bruderhofs* or communes and said, "There is a growing restlessness and sense of change. Young boys were asking me for cigarettes, but more than that, they wanted me to tell them about the world." But he added, "Still there is something in the Hutterian way of life that is completely admirable, indeed enviable, and makes me wonder whether it might not do all of us a lot of good to investigate the secrets of their way of life."

That was what the government of the United States asked through its Health Department and authorized a grant of nineteen thousand dollars to Wayne University, Detroit, for research to determine "what makes the Hutterites appear so socially well-adjusted?"

Once more I heard the colonies calling. The scattered, hard-to-find communes in Canada, the brotherhoods whose disintegration I thought I had foreseen beckoned like an inner voice. I decided to visit them again, though it might mean side entrances or no entrances at all.

To stop at the colonies in Alberta was my first objective. They were separated from the Manitoba groups by six hundred prairie miles, and since the Hutterians have no central organization I felt sure that one settlement, at least, would welcome me. Hopefully I drove into the vast wheat-covered acres of the Pincher Creek commune.

In the distance, against a background of faraway mountains and billows of drifting clouds, the buildings stood like an old-world barracks. My car crept nearer. With every moment the illusion changed and when I drove through the long, treeless lane, I spied a modern electric "windcharger" whirling on its high steel tower. At the edge of the commune a giant tank of "bottled gas" crouched like a behemoth near a newly constructed three-story building of poured concrete. I blinked unbelievingly as I brought my car to a stop near a well-built modern school. The plain, unattractive houses of the past were covered with red-brick veneer. Colorful, for the first time, stood the *Bruderhof.* Sidewalks joined the houses in the clean and well-swept yard. Electric wires and a water system told me that here was a commune in transition. Then, out of the quiet so typical of midday in the colonies, came the distant drone of combines hungrily devouring the fields.

I got out of my car wondering where the people were, anxious to see whether they, too, had changed with their environment. A woman peeped shyly from one of the homes. I spied the blue polka-dot head covering. The door opened. I saw the conventional full blouse and the long full skirt. So much at least was still traditional.

The woman recognized me and came over with a warm, eager welcome. Once more, by the strange sixth sense of the commune, other women appeared and groups of children came from places of play and work to gather around the car.

"Come and stay!" they greeted. "There is so much to show you. Much has happened since you were here long ago."

A special friend, tall, impressive Paul Gross, strode smiling across the yard. He covered my hands with his, and his soft eyes told me he was glad that I had come. With justifiable pride Paul took me on an inspection of the grounds and buildings. "Come and see," he said, "how gas, electricity and water have transformed the commune."

With groups of women and children at our heels we inspected the community from vegetable cellars to modern spotlessly clean barns and shops. It was an up-to-date farm equipped to serve and satisfy some two hundred people.

"So the Hutterites are changing!" I laughed.

"Outwardly perhaps," Paul said, and his bearded face was serious. "But within—" he indicated his heart—"there is no change."

That was the confident assertion in nearly every Alberta colony which I visited, and yet I was sure that the early founders would never have believed that such modernity could be introduced without a dangerous compromise with the world.

"Are you happier with these innovations?" I asked. "Do you want more conveniences now that you have gone this far? How about radios, automobiles, photographs? How about freedom to come and go as you will?"

"We will go as far as it is safe to go," a young Hutterian affirmed, "and the older men know how far that is. Of course, maybe every generation will go a little farther."

And that was the older men's concern.

"The bait hides the hook," one said. "If we would be perfectly realistic we would have to say that the world has already crept in. Outwardly we can see what has happened. Inwardly we feel it."

"Yet," said another, "I think our young people will not go too far. We all had a growing-up period when we wanted to kick against the traces. The job is to get over this hump of growing up."

"And how can that be done?" I asked.

"The best thing is marriage," came the reply. "When a young man has something to live for and children to work for, he knows that the Hutterian way is far better than the world's way. Marriage gives a man a mooring."

Evidently the spirit of the world knew this, too, for one day I found a magazine on a house bench: *True Romances!* And the spirit of the world also knew what a weapon it had in labor-saving devices. Knitting machines were creating leisure. Modern appliances were beginning to make inroads into a realm where there had always been a saying: "Idle hands tempt the devil." Modernization was slowly changing the ways and the manners of the world's "plain people."

"Buttons," a young Hutterian told me, "are better than hooks and eyes, and zippers are better than buttons."

When I left the Alberta communes I felt that my Manitoba prediction of 1947 was coming true.

Then I dropped down to the mother colony, Bon Homme, South Dakota, always the most conservative and isolated of them all. There was no longer any gate. The lane seemed almost a country thoroughfare. A tractor covered with young Hutterians was moving into a near-by field. I watched it disappear as I stepped out of my car. From somewhere near the river came the throb of an electric dynamo like the insistent pounding of the *Weltgeist.* A large truck, designed to carry passengers, stood near the barn.

But the flocks of geese moved through the yard and the children gathered curiously around my car just as they always had. The houses had not changed. Chalk-block dwellings and the plain frame structures showed unmistakably that beauty and ornamentation held no appeal to these followers of the simple life. To all appearances Bon Homme and its people were determined to hold back the knife of change.

A lone figure came somberly from the machine shed, walking slowly, eying me inquisitively from under his black hat. His bearded face lighted with a smile of greeting and he took my hand. "Well, well, Marc," he said. "How glad my father would have been to see you again!"

For a moment I saw in him the almost legendary figure of Pastor Waldner who three years ago had died at Bon Homme.

"You remember we sent you a telegram at the time of the funeral," his son was saying.

"Yes, I remember. I hope you got my letter telling you I was sorry I could not come."

"Of course we got it. But come in, come in. How long will you stay? We always have a room for you."

Figures came from the homes and the shops—mothers with their children, little girls carrying babies. The long-handled wagons moved through the yard. The colony dog came up and sniffed at me. Generously the people took me to a home which had not changed even to the ladder leading upstairs and the highly polished rolling pin hanging from its ribbons on the wall.

What *had* changed at Bon Homme? The women no longer trudged to the cowyard, for milking machines had taken care of that, and there was a gleam in the eyes of the woman who gave me the information—a look that said, "That's progress, isn't it?" The old-fashioned ovens had given way to new electric stoves. There was talk of correspondence courses and the value of "outside reading," but most of all was the change I noticed in the language. The trend here as in all the communes was decidedly toward English.

"And when English comes in," an old Hutterian mused, "then what? Out go the songs. Out go a tradition and a heritage. But who can hold it back?"

I went again to the evening service in the schoolhouse and later I sat with old friends in a meeting after churchtime. The men and the boys filled the room. Outside in the darkened yard the women and young girls sat listening and whispering among themselves. We talked about the colonies and the world, about "God's way and the way of the godless." Names of Hutterians—there are only about a dozen family names in all the colonies—came into the conversation as if to assure me that all were still in the fold and none had been lost—Hofer, Gross, Waldner, Wipf, Maendel.

"I must see John J. again," I said. "I often wonder how he is getting along."

"Didn't you hear what has happened?"

I straightened instinctively. "What?" I asked.

"He is pretty busy."

"Where?"

"We hear that he and his colony are ready to expand. John J. is working harder than ever."

I laughed. "For a moment," I said, "I thought you were going to say that he had gone out into the world."

"You and your world!" chided one of the older men good-naturedly. "Do you really think we can ever be conquered? If you do you are only making another mistake."

Somehow I hoped that he was right and that I was wrong. For as I went to sleep that night on one of the deep feather mattresses, I heard soft singing in the adjoining rooms. A Hutterian and his family were closing another commune day. The song was followed by a crisp command in the rapid Tyrolean dialect ordering the children to go to sleep. "Don't think that just because we've had a long evening we can sleep late in the morning. The bell still rings at the same time."

The ebb and flow of moonlight against the small-paned windows, the faraway stamp of cattle in the barn, the ruffled noise of the restless geese, the barely audible drone of an automobile on a country road and a feeling of security and peace wrought their timeless patterns in my mind.

Somehow the commune people had their place in America, bringing with them their staunch principles from an earlier home. The Hutterite stands for something: a quest—the deep, eternal quest of the human soul in the midst of a world not of his making and not of his choice. To him that world seems more evil than it really is, and he must remain ever vigilant and cautious, for he has a saying: "The good are easily deceived."

CHAPTER V

THE PENITENTE

In the glaring moonlight the desert ran out toward the foothills of the Sangre de Cristos like a rolling sea. The mountains formed a shore line against which the patches of sage swayed like the silent lapping of waves. Sage, scrub oak and sand were transformed into an enchanted mirage by the magic of this Holy Week night, but what arrested my attention was a squat, square building hovering like a houseboat down in the valley.

I turned quickly to my companion. He lifted a hand in warning as if to hold my eagerness in check. For a moment his slender form was poised as he peered guardedly into the night. His voice thrilled as he said, *"Si, señor,* that is the *morada."*

Cautiously the moonlight allowed the building to come into perspective. The sense of sea and motion was restored to New Mexico desert as I viewed the isolated *morada,* the chapel of the Brothers Penitent.

My young Mexican companion and I had come upon it suddenly, having tramped all evening in search of such a hideaway where the self-crucifiers would be holding a service. We had seen several *moradas* before this midnight hour, but they had been deserted. This one betrayed by a narrow line of light around the crevice of the door that there was life within.

Life there might be, but no sound. The tireless quiet was made intense by a chill wind whispering hauntingly in the clusters of desert growth.

"Well, Carlos," I said, with no attempt to hide my enthusiasm, "at last we've found one."

Carlos remained a silhouette in sharply etched profile. His black hair glistened. The moonlight touched a small silver chain around his neck.

"Yes," he said, "we are here." And I thought he became suddenly stolid and impersonal.

We were here but obviously he was hesitant about our next move. The *morada* was one church where outsiders did not walk boldly in, particularly during this week before Easter. We were here, two days before Good Friday, uninvited and subject to the mood of any guard who might be prowling for Penitente-peepers in the area.

Inside the *morada* was a service I wanted desperately to see, a ritual about which I had no information excepting rumors. What was going on behind those windowless walls? Holy Week in this Penitente country between Santa Fe and Taos was, according to the world, an orgy of fanatical rites and torture; according to the Brothers Penitent, it was a time of ecstatical glory and release from sin. I wanted to find out which point of view was correct, which opinion should be believed and whether the sensationalized reports might have overlooked some hidden but useful spiritual practices.

I had traveled nearly two thousand miles for this moment; now I was here with the *morada* some six hundred feet below me in the sloping valley. What would happen if I were to walk boldly to the forbidden sanctuary and rap for admittance?

In uncanny response to this thought, a square of yellow light unfolded against the dark *morada* wall. It blacked out, then reappeared, then dissolved slowly.

"They're opening the door," I whispered.

"To let in fresh air," Carlos explained.

The door opened again. The yellow, illuminated frame in the adobe wall was like the glow of a harborlight calling. As my eyes grew accustomed to it, I could discern the shadowy figure of a doorkeeper. Watching and counting the recurrent appearance of the thin curtain of light, I waited impatiently for Carlos to make up his mind.

"Aren't we going down?" I asked.

Carlos started to reply. Then his body tensed. "Listen!" he warned.

Anxiously we pierced the shadows. I saw nothing. I heard nothing but the rustle of the wind and the faraway yelping of a dog. But Carlos dropped to the ground behind a clump of bushes and pulled me down beside him. After the first hushed moment of concealment I heard faintly the crunch of gravel. I held my breath. The footsteps advanced, then stopped. The wind counted the moments. Suddenly the air hissed and a stick crashed down against the brush near by.

"Largate!" came the gruff command.

We listened and waited, fearing that the Penitente guard would be drawn to us by the very thoughts with which we sought to hold him back. We were each waiting for the other to betray a sound, the snap of a twig, the telltale grating of the gravel. The lonely far-off yelping of the dog was all I heard.

I turned to look at Carlos. He put a warning finger over his lips. Why, I wondered, was he inviting danger by this concealment? Wouldn't it be better to face the guard and tell him our story? Carlos could say, "I have brought a friend who wants to find out something about *Los Hermanos Penitentes.* If it is all right, we should like to go down to the *morada;* if not, we will *largate*—get out of here—as you say." Evidently Carlos had other plans.

So did the watchman. I heard him grumble under his breath. A moment later a shower of gravel fell like sudden hail near by. The footsteps started again, accompanied by the sound of a stick threshing the bushes with an angry rhythm. Our adversary was evidently determined to cover every inch of his beat. We heard him approach, move on, then return nearer than before. It would be only a matter of time until he would discover us. It was a well-known saying in the Sangre de Cristos that "the guards have guns."

Suddenly, in the hushed expectancy, a wail of singing filled the night around us and rose in a dirge over the lonely land. It was startling in its intensity and sent a quiver through the body of my companion. His hands came together in a nervous, impulsive clasp. Then he relaxed and nodded as if to say it was what he had been anticipating. To me the voices came from all the *moradas* which we had explored earlier and found dark and lonely. They were surrounding us now, closing in on us with words that my limited Spanish interpreted as "Come and repent. Come, weep and suffer. Be sorry for your sins and come to God."

Carlos raised his head. He was reaching out to absorb the inarticulate phrases. As I watched him I realized that our danger had lessened. I ventured to straighten slightly. Through the dark branches I caught sight of the Penitente guard. He was short and swarthy and dressed in black. A white handkerchief was tied around his forehead. He stood with the stick in his hand, but he was absorbed by the singing more than by our presence. A bad guard, but a good Penitente, I told myself but I was not sure.

"The guards have guns" was more than just a handy phrase. I recalled the attempt that had been made on the life of explorer Charles Loomis. He tried to get a picture of a Penitente crucifixion and was shot in the neck. That was years ago, but I had no reason to believe that *Los Hermanos* had changed. So I watched while the moments passed, feeling that perhaps Carlos knew best. Then unexpectedly our watchman turned and slowly started to walk away. The *morada* service was calling him. I clutched Carlos' arm and started to get up. He shook his head vigorously, motioning me to remain still. For several moments he sat with drawn lips while the voices of the worshiping men intoned another chant.

"It is an *alabado,"* he told me, rising from his cramped position. "Listen, it is very pretty. It says, 'Weep, Penitente, weep till sin is no more. Tears will redeem you. Weep now for your arrogant sins.' "

"Is it our cue to go down?" I asked.

Carlos shook his head. "We are too late," he announced.

"Too late?"

"When we go to a service," he said firmly, "I want first to talk to the Hermano Mayor or the Celador."

By the Hermano Mayor he meant the Elder Brother or leader of the group; the Celador was the warden or doorkeeper.

"But can't we go down and speak to the Hermano Mayor now? The worst he can do is to tell us to leave."

"Tomorrow night," said Carlos flatly. With a maturity beyond his twenty-two years he philosophized, "Outsiders do not understand the Brothers and the Brothers do not understand outsiders."

By outsiders he meant not only white-skinned Americanos, but also brown-skinned Americanos like himself who had been walled out by the world and had ostracized themselves from their fathers' faith. He meant boys like himself who were sons of Penitente parents and at school had found a conflict between modern America and native cultures and beliefs. Carlos' family had been in this country for two generations.

Carlos and I had met at a Western college where I had been invited to watch the performance of a play. He was doing the lead in a drama that I had written on the life of the Trappist monks. Cast in the role of the young postulant who was trying to adjust himself to the rigorous vows of the Trappist order, Carlos interpreted his part with sensitive feeling. His deep Catholic convictions and his unusually strong stage presence resulted in a convincing portrayal.

In talks with him I had learned that his convictions went deeper than mere acting ability. Carlos was devoutly religious and confided to me that his training had been influenced by Penitente practices while he still lived in New Mexico. When I told him that I was anxious to know more about *Los Hermanos,* he said, "I can get you in." We had promptly made arrangements to meet in Santa Fe during the Easter vacation.

That promise he had kept. We had been together since early afternoon touring Penitente villages, waiting for this Penitente night. Now, for the first time, he seemed to regret that he had brought me this far.

"Will there be another service tomorrow night?" I asked impatiently.

"Of course," he said, then added, "It is really not good to go down now."

"I expected some hazards," I assured him.

"It is not that," he countered. "I would rather go as a guest than as an intruder."

"Don't you know any of the men in this *morada?"*

"I suppose I do."

"Maybe you know the guard?" I wondered.

"It could be," he said with a shrug. "But sometimes the guards are more difficult than the Hermano Mayor."

He stood watching the dark *morada.* The discordant voices were growing more and more animated. Occasionally a hint of uncontrolled fanaticism broke through, evidenced by a sharp, piercing cry or by an extended wail in the midst of the singing.

"What are they saying now?" I asked.

"Something about suffering," he replied, as if trying to bring the exact lines out of the past. "Something about there being no salvation without suffering."

"Did you used to sing those songs? The song they are singing now—did you know that one?"

Before he could reply, the frame of light in the adobe wall showed that the door had been flung open. Men were stepping out of the lighted passage like figures emerging and enlarging on a screen. Some were stripped to the waist and carried what appeared to be short sticks. The men swayed with the increasing frenzy of the chant. While they were still coming through the candlelighted door, the swish of a whip cut through the night. This started a general flagellation, setting off a volley of whirling whips which fell with sickening cracks upon human flesh as the men started moving around the *morada* in a writhing, scourging procession.

I looked quickly from this incredible exhibition to Carlos, for he started impulsively, clenching his hands. Whether it was resentment or instinctive remembrance, I could not tell; his expression gave me no clue. Then, in a moment, seemingly relaxed, he folded his arms. He might have been the director of a play critically watching a well-known scene on opening night.

Walking and crawling with a jerking motion, the Penitentes circled the building, going from the moonlit area into the shadows like victims of a march of death. They whipped themselves mercilessly over their shoulders and bent their backs to companions who laid screaming lashes across their bodies. It was an unforgettable atonement: wailing men thrashing the devils out of their flesh; chanting men burying the stinging blows of the multiple whips under their unintelligible cries. It was a terror-ridden, rhythmic parade of torture timed by the cutting, knifelike swish of the lash and accompanied by the guttural intonations of *"Penitencia!"*

Grimly Carlos reasoned, "You can see why it would have been bad to go down."

"It's real," I said, and I was answering a question that had persisted ever since I first heard of the Penitentes long ago.

"It is real," Carlos confirmed in a low voice. "The whippings are not make-believe. They are not token whippings that do not hurt. They are real. Too real perhaps."

"Who knows that?" I asked. "Who knows that better than you?"

He said nothing. The terrifying swish and crack of the whips resounded against the foothills of the Sangre de Cristos. Penitente blood was flowing. The halting, jerking *danse macabre* went on. Frequently a shuddering groan moved through the sadistic ritual, and Carlos flinched as if he felt the sting of the whips; then convulsive screams mingled with a moaning cry, a cry of conquering faith rather than pain.

"They think," he said falteringly, "that the whips bring them closer to God. They do it to show God they are sorry for their sins. People do not understand. People see only the torture." He turned to me. "Do *you* understand?" he demanded. "Do you know what it means? This is how the Blessed Master suffered for us. He was tortured and wounded. He was crucified. We honor Him for it. We are always told how He did it for us, why should we not do it for Him?"

"Do the men keep these things in mind?" I asked earnestly.

"Yes, of course," Carlos insisted. "That is the reason for it all. That is the real meaning of *penitencia."*

His words had grown impassioned. Realizing this, he got himself quickly in hand and turned once more to watch the barbaric disorderly march. I watched, too, hearing the shuddering chant in my soul and feeling the crack of the whips deep in the fiber of my being. Always there was the staccato snap of the whips and the sight of arms flung upward in the light of the lanterns.

"The Brothers say it draws them nearer to God." The voice of Carlos was thoughtful and groping. "That is true. A little suffering in this life is better than much suffering in the life to come...."

The night wind bore his words away. For a hasty moment he had opened the door of his *morada* experiences.

"We have seen enough," he declared with finality. "If we stayed another hour we would see nothing different. This is the way it is."

So saying, he turned his back on the *morada* scene. The whips kept up their feverish work. Several Penitentes lay as if dead in the dim radius of the lantern light. Others stumbled aimlessly, caught in the current of suffering. I turned from this bloody ceremony with the stark remembrance of a sight unrelated to anything I had ever witnessed in any other religion anywhere. Would there actually be another scene like this on the morrow or at any other time?

Carlos, having stopped a few feet from me, paused to look at me appealingly and with concern. "I do not know what you think of this," he began. "I do not know how you expect to understand the Brothers. It may be that outsiders can never understand. I have never found anyone who did." With the faint hint of a smile he added grimly, "Just now I do not know whether I understand it all myself."

I had nothing to say. The sight of Carlos Marquez as he walked through the desert was to me another Penitente procession. It was the march of the educated Brothers Penitent fighting against early indoctrination. How deep did that indoctrination go? Surely something more than mere sensationalism had perpetuated the worship of *Los Hermanos* from the days of the conquest to this hour. The "decent people" of New Mexico had not been able to stamp it out. Protestants had branded it as paganism and fraud. Legislation had only pruned from it the fainthearted. Mother Church had driven it underground. In Santa Fe a Roman Catholic priest had told me, "The Penitentes are good Catholics throughout the year but during the forty days of Lent something happens to them, and there is nothing I can do but let them go. During those days they worship in their own way in the *moradas."*

Carlos and I walked the moonlit mile to our car, while the clean, cool scent of the desert purged the air of suffering and carried away the fading *morada* sounds. When we had left behind us the last muffled cries, Carlos said with mingled pride and pain, "You have seen and heard the worship of *Los Hermanos.* What do you think?"

"That is a hard question," I answered. "I have nothing with which to compare it. You have. You can judge it by your impressions during the days when you thought the practices were necessary and right. How does it seem to *you?"*

"I am full of feelings." He sighed. "Parent religion goes deep."

"Especially when there is so much physical suffering connected with it?"

"Oh, the suffering," he said in dismissal. "There is more than the suffering. I am afraid that you, like everyone else, will see only the whips. You will go away from here remembering only the flagellation."

"Tell me, Carlos," I inquired sincerely, "are there still marks of the whip on your back?"

"I am not on exhibit!" he said evasively.

"Forgive me," I hastened to say. Then I explained: "I spoke to a doctor in Santa Fe who said that during the war he was surprised how many men had Penitente marks on their backs when they came in for their examinations."

"Yes," Carlos agreed, "but there were more during World War I than during World War II."

"You mean your people don't follow the faith as closely as they used to?"

"At one time there were twelve or fifteen thousand members in the Brotherhood. Today there are less than half that many."

"Is that good or bad?"

"It is bad," he said flatly. "But isn't that the way with all religions? Aren't they all losing the really deep truths? And why? Because they want to make religion easy. Religion is never easy. It was not easy for our Lord and for the saints and for all the truly religious. That is why my feeling about the *morada* is different from yours. The Brothers may not have the right way, but they have a way that is real. *Los Hermanos Penitentes* is a spiritual fraternity. It has its officers and its constitution. Its members must live good lives and be the best Christians they can. Even the priests do not always understand the Penitentes. I once spoke to one who thought we were all a little crazy."

We had reached the lonely wagon trail where I had parked the car. The spot was not deserted now, for several dark figures became suddenly alert when we stepped into the moonlit road. Carlos stopped short for a brief, uncertain moment. Then, realizing it was only a gang of boys, he shouted, *"Largate, muchachos!"*

The group scattered feverishly. Carlos did not laugh at their frenzied rout. Instead he observed solemnly, "You see how it is. The young boys are out Penitente-peeping, thinking their own religion is a curiosity." Then, as if aware that he, too, had been little more than an interloper on this Holy Wednesday night, he lapsed into thought, essaying only to direct me to an unused trail, a short cut back to the highway.

"When you were their age," I said, "what were you doing on the nights of Holy Week? That wasn't too long ago."

"I was learning the songs. Sometimes I watched the services, but never as a curiosity. It was religion with me. I was young when I became one of *Los Hermanos.*"

"You mean when you were initiated?"

"It was on a Holy Tuesday. I went to the door of the *morada.* I rapped and said, 'A child of God knocks for God's grace.' From within the Brothers answered, 'Penance, penance, which seeks salvation.' I said, 'Saint Peter will open the gates for me. He will fill me with light in the name of Mary. Who gives us this light?' The Brothers replied, 'Jesus.' 'Who fills this house with joy?' 'Mary.' 'Who keeps its faith?' 'Joseph.' "

"And so you were admitted?"

"I went in and took my place in front of the Hermano Mayor. 'I have come to the Lord Jesus Christ to perform my devotion. I ask the forgiveness of the Brothers if I have offended any of them.' The Brothers said, 'May God pardon him who is already pardoned of us.' Then I went to them on my knees and kissed their hands and feet. . . ."

"And then?"

"Later I was given three meditations for the passion and death of our Lord."

"Meditations?"

"Marks on the flesh," said Carlos.

"With the whip?"

"With a piece of flint. Three incisions on the back. They are put there by the Picador and they, too, remind us of the passion of our Lord."

"When did you first ask for the whip?"

"During that same Holy Week," Carlos replied and remained in thought for a time as we drove on to the village of Pecos. "I asked to be struck five times with the whip. Five times for the five wounds of the Savior. You must always remember that the chief purpose of the order is the imitation of our Father Jesus, not in the suffering only, but in the life as well. The Brothers are very good men. You would understand them better if you saw them at other times than during the holy days. Then you could speak to them. There are usually ten officials in the fraternity. They are called the Brothers of Light."

He was more willing to talk about them than about himself and outlined the duties of the most important officers. Besides the Hermano Mayor and the Celador, there was the Coadjutor to whom was assigned the task of washing the whips; the Enfermero, who treated severe wounds during the flagellation ceremonies, but who more particularly visited the sick and the needy throughout the year; the Maestro de Novios, instructor of the initiates; the Rezador or reader of the prayers.

"I will see," Carlos said reservedly, "whether it may be possible for you to meet one of these men."

"Tomorrow?"

"It would help you to understand," he replied.

"I can understand that the services are a test of faith," I assured him. "After all, flagellation is simply an exaggerated form of Lenten penance. Many people deny themselves certain pleasures during the forty days. Some give up smoking. Some fast. Some make other sacrifices. I knew a man, a Protestant, who forced himself to get up at six o'clock every morning to read the Bible! That was whipping himself."

Carlos laughed. "That may or may not be a good comparison," he said. "But I will see you tomorrow afternoon. Well, really this afternoon, for it is after two o'clock."

We were now in the unlighted village of Pecos and he directed me along a dirt street and over a small loose-planked bridge. Carlos was staying with an aunt at the outskirts of Pecos and I was planning to drive back to Santa Fe. We said good night in front of a forlorn wooden shack set back from a miserable road. A candle was burning low in a crooked window.

The thirty-mile ride to Santa Fe in the early morning hour was my excursion into the Penitente past. There was not another car on the highway. The night was superb. I wondered whether the moonlight was as bewitching on that other Holy Week when Don Juan de Oñate, the sixteenth-century conqueror brought the practice of flagellation into the New Mexico province. Conquistador and colonizer, he came up from Old Mexico with his soldiers and his Franciscans, properly fortified with the sword and the cross. In 1598 and 1599 he conquered this territory "for the service of God and the good of the natives." In the wake of terrific native slaughter by Spanish artillery, Don Juan built the first Christian churches in New Mexico, blessed rivers and christened villages with the melodious names of the saints. He subjugated the heathen and cut off the feet of the Acoma captives. He chopped off the heads of the Moqui prisoners and gave God the credit for overcoming the enemy who were equipped only with native spears. His friars said their beads amid the plundered villages and augmented the Kingdom of Heaven with war-stunned prisoners and tortured slaves.

On a night during Holy Week, at the height of his undisputed power, the valiant Don Juan proclaimed a period of fasting and prayer. He sought to show the Lord that he was indebted to Him for past conquests and so invoked Him for future aid. Hidden within the quixotic Don was a strange and impelling desire to suffer as Jesus had suffered during the days of that first Holy Week. The soldiers and friars knew of Oñate's greatness, but only he knew of his sins. In the midst of his kingly triumphs Don Juan longed for the scourge; while his spirit was lifted up, he vowed to discipline the flesh. And so he went out, apart from the camp, with only his captain, Gaspar de Villagra. He went out into the lonely, moonlit desert, fashioned a whip of cactus and fiber of aloe, and stripped himself naked to his waist. Clutching this *disciplina* in both hands, he struck himself over his right shoulder, then over his left, whipping and weeping and crying to God until his own blood began to be shed for the remission of his sins. There was no one to see him except Villagra. No Penitente-peepers. Here in this moon-bleached country through which I was now riding, Don Juan had tried to express an emotion he could not put into words. Perhaps the witchery of the holy night had driven him on; and loneliness, the loneliness of a soul that had conquered but not always in good faith.

I could still hear the seething swish and the dull crack of Penitente whips, and it was Oñate flogging himself. I could still see the upraised hands of the marching men, and they were the captains and priests who came to Oñate when they heard the sound of his cactus scourge. They came to Don Juan as Carlos Marquez and I had come to the hillock above the valley. But they refused to be spectators.

The lowly Franciscans made crowns of cactus and pressed them down on their heads when they beheld the example of their leader. Chanting and in tears, they threw off their mantles and begged for the lash. The soldiers lacerated their backs; women and children walked barefoot over the cactus-covered ground. Captain de Villagra took up the whip of his beloved leader and turned it upon himself while a single word rose as an offering from the altars of pain: *"Penitencia!"*

Penance through flagellation according to Christian tradition sprang from a deep human yearning to imitate the suffering of Christ. Historically it was publicly instituted by a Benedictine monk of the eighth century. Carlos said that for *Los Hermanos* it went back to Saint Francis and the special whippers of the Third Order. I thought of Carlos Marquez more than I did of Saint Francis or Oñate as I neared Santa Fe.

And when I returned to the comfort of the La Fonda Hotel, the thought of men flailing and hacking their bodies seemed altogether insane. Self-torture was outright paganism. That there might be special merit in the whir of whips was gross superstition. Sadism and exhibitionism seemed the logical conclusion about *Los Hermanos,* but ever into my thoughts came the figure of Carlos and I remembered how he had said, "The Brothers may not have the right way, but they have a way that is real."

That is how it looked to me—real, earnest, bloody. Might a real crucifixion be enacted somewhere in the darksome shadows of the Sangre de Cristos, which by interpretation meant "the Blood of Christ"? Perhaps on this Holy Thursday which was already dawning, I would know.

According to tradition, Thursday was the day on which Jesus partook of the Last Supper. It also commemorated His retreat to Gethsemane and His betrayal. It was rumored that *Los Her-*

manos followed the events of Christ's last days in an authentic Passion Play and that only the members of the Brotherhood were permitted to see these portrayals.

Spurred by a determination to seek out these clandestine performances, I left in midmorning for several villages where *moradas* indicated that Penitente activities were part of the community life. I went the easy way, on improved highways, to the towns of Chimayo, Truchas, Abiquiu and Ranchito. These easily accessible settlements provided me with a tourist view of Holy Thursday in the land of the Passionists. Tourists and Penitente-peepers were there in force. They came with cameras, and they brought cigarettes to bribe the Brothers Penitent. Around the tightly closed and strangely quiet *moradas* they set up their tripods and waited, complaining that no real Penitente showed up to pose even for a price. None came to drag the heavy crosses propped up in the chapel sands. Where was the site for Gethsemane? Where the scene for the betrayal? The unhurried and seemingly unimportant life of the towns went on in its lazy rhythm. Lacking an American Oberammergau, the camera enthusiasts settled for a herd of goats, a plank wagon, a *charro* on his finely caparisoned horse or a boy on his pinto. Better subjects were the Mexican women loitering in the nearly deserted plazas, standing with their black shawls drawn tightly across the tips of their chins.

A woman with a box camera clutched in her gloved hands stopped me in Abiquiu. "When do things start around here?" she wanted to know. "I expected to see blood running in the street and all I've found is a little Mexican girl carrying Easter palms." She could have done better at Alcalde.

There shortly before noon a lone Penitente, dressed only in soiled white trunks, appeared at the edge of the town dragging a huge cross in the manner of the Crucified. He was barefooted and when he headed toward the desert, the excitement became intense. "He'll walk right through the cactus!" a spectator announced. "Yes," added another, "I hear they don't turn off the trail even if there's a rattlesnake in their way." The strained body of the modern Cyrene, his agonized face and his blind disregard for his surroundings made him an excellent study, and crowds flocked around him, cameras clicking.

He would have had company all the way to his desert Calvary but for a harsh staccato sound that flared suddenly. It was the noise of the *metracas,* a wooden rattle, spun in the dark hands of an aged Brother Penitent, heralding the public Procession of the Cross. Far up the street we could see banner-decked poles proudly displayed by Mexican men. Then a small cross, elevated on a standard and decorated with colored streamers, was lifted high. As the marchers approached, I saw wooden images of the Virgin and Joseph and a somewhat larger statue of Christ carried amid a chanting group of men, women and children in festive attire.

This might have been a bit of Catholic pageantry among members of Mother Church anywhere, but the tourists made it spectacular. They crowded and shoved, monopolized the right of way, and climbed to the roofs of adobe dwellings for vantage points from which to view and photograph the worshipers.

This was religious research American-style, and that afternoon I confessed to Carlos Marquez that I had shared in it. When I described the events to him in the two-room cabin at Pecos it did not amuse him. I was asked how I would feel if someone came to my church services, camera in hand. What if my Holy Week observances were invaded? Carlos' aunt, who could speak no English, expressed pain and disgust when Carlos related my experience to her. I gathered from her reply that sight-seers and intruders were her reasons for staying away from the public processions. Her husband had been an important official of the Brotherhood and extremely resentful of outsiders whose only motive was curiosity.

"He was the Maestro de Novios," Carlos explained.

"Was it he who instructed you?" I asked.

Carlos translated the question into Spanish for the diminutive woman who stood with her arms wrapped within her black shawl. She nodded solemnly. In her dark eyes were depths of gentleness and understanding that spoke of a faith that neither time nor intrusion had shaken.

The room in which she stood was her evidence: a small santo in its garishly colored costume stood on a homemade sideboard, a corpus hung against the whitewashed wall, dusty palm fronds stuck out from behind a picture of the Sacred Heart, a rosary lay on top of several worn books on the tiny table.

Her glance was charged with accusation as she looked at me. She seemed to ask, "Is it you who took Carlos away? What have you to offer him that is better? Because you do not understand us, does that make our way of life wrong?"

"My uncle was my teacher," Carlos was saying. "He trained many for the fraternity. He was also the Rezador for a time. I wish you could have heard him say the prayers. He was like a priest."

"I am told," I said, "that very often the Penitente officials, the Hermano Mayor in particular, serves in place of the priest. This has aroused opposition from the church. Then, too, *Los*

Hermanos has its secret obligation. How does this agree with Roman Catholic teaching?"

"Those are not the reasons that the church opposes *Los Hermanos,"* Carlos responded. "Nor is it the whips or the cross. It is public opinion. Ever since outsiders began prying into the fraternity, the Brothers have been considered fanatics."

Again he translated his words into rapid, idiomatic Spanish for his aunt. She replied that her husband had often been called on to do priestly duties. And why not, since there were not enough priests to serve all the scattered communities?

I asked, "Did you tell your aunt that we saw the whippings last night?"

"Of course," Carlos said promptly. "I told her just how it was."

He explained to his aunt what we were discussing. She murmured disdainfully and shook her head. I could make out her answer. "I never thought, Carlos, that you would spy upon your own people."

"Does she object to our plans for tonight?" I asked.

"In a way," he admitted. "She has suggested that I talk to the Hermano Mayor in a certain village and explain to him why I have brought you."

"What are you saying?" asked his aunt in Spanish.

"You need not worry," he said to her. "I have already told my friend that I was once with the Brothers."

"To turn against your people, Carlos——" she said bitterly.

"I have come back to my people, *querida tía,"* he assured her.

She looked at him for a long moment and the faint light of a smile touched her lips. Then she glanced at me, her eyes gentle and luminous. Carlos exchanged a few personal questions with her. She was satisfied at last about my presence. In my poor Spanish I thanked her for her confidence in me and for her hospitality. She was pleased.

"Back to my people," Carlos repeated in his native tongue. "You remember the prayer, *ti ita mia,* 'Bring us ever homeward, for we are poor lost children of Eve. . . .' "

She did not reply.

"Carlos," I ventured, "did you often ask for the whips after your initiation?"

"There were certain times," he said evasively. "Usually the only period for such penance is during the Fridays of Lent and on the days of Holy Week. But when my uncle died——"

"There were whippings then?"

"Yes." After a moment he continued, "It is hard to explain. There is something that cannot be put into words. Doesn't everyone have moments when he feels he wants to express to God some inner feeling? That cannot be put into words, either. Those may be moments of great sorrow or great joy. Holy Week to us is very real. The passion and death of our Lord is something that happens not only to Him, but to us, too, for we are part of His mystical body. My uncle used to say, 'We are all children of Adam; it is the capacity for suffering that makes the difference. To those who do not know how to suffer, all life is death.' "

He rose with an attitude of dismissal. In rapid Spanish he addressed his aunt. "With much talk nothing is settled." He said this as if it were a familiar proverb. He kissed her lightly. "I will try to be back tonight, *querida tía,*" he said, "but if something happens, do not let the candle burn down the house."

She made no reply. I said good-by to her and her soft *"Adios"* was like a benediction, but it was accompanied by a glance that was not without suspicion.

Carlos and I drove for nearly two hours over a route that took us far off the highway through ruts that scraped the bottom of the car and over roads that showed no signs of recent travel. A rotting bridge and a winding trail brought us into an arroyo where we followed a little-used wagon road for about a quarter of a mile. Soon the trail led upward to a wide ridge of ground. It was now nearly sundown. In the distance I could see the outline of a tiny village situated on a stretch of barren tableland at about the same elevation as the rise on which we were traveling. We paused to contemplate the devious grade that would lead us down. While Carlos got out to chart our course, I viewed the distant settlement. It was perhaps a mile away, completely isolated. The one-story buildings were coarsely sculptured out of the brownish-red earth and were surrounded by sand and a landscaping of sky. One object caught my attention: the faint outline of a huge cross upright on a knoll somewhat apart from the village. No cars were to be seen. No tourists had stormed this sanctuary. I wondered whether any guard had spied us as we paused on this distant ridge.

Carlos reported that we could make it if we drove cautiously. In the near dusk we continued a short distance, then turned sharply to head downward where we crawled slowly to a mud-plastered road. By the time we found ourselves on this level stretch of tableland, darkness was settling down. We ascended a gradual slope and startled a cluster of buildings with our headlights. I caught sight of canvas flaps serving as doors in the adobe homes. Occasionally there was a faint flicker of a light inside. As we entered a narrow street the shadows of furtive youngsters, the piercing eyes of a dark face, the quick glance of a black-shawled woman were our dubious welcome. Then, as if a curtain had been lifted on an ancient courtyard scene, our lights beamed across a crowd of villagers in and around the sandy plaza. Their faces registered resentment and fright. I stopped the car and snapped off the lights even before Carlos ordered, "This is far enough."

We got out and walked the short half block to the place where the people were congregated. Women and children predominated. They looked at us curiously and gathered around as Carlos addressed himself to an elderly señora. She stared at him hesitantly and pointed to a group farther on.

"Stay close to me," Carlos directed.

We made our way through the crowd and I now saw that the *morada* was nearly adjacent to the plaza. At least I supposed the dark rectangular building to be the *morada,* for heavy crosses were propped near its door and the mumble of voices could be heard inside. Near by stood a man with a lighted lantern in his hand. We were now close to the outside rim of the crowd and again Carlos identified himself to one of the women. He asked her a question, mentioning a name.

His words moved through the shrouded figures. There was excited motion around us as a woman came forward. I saw that she was very old and when she came to where we stood she said, "Carlos Marquez" with a sob in her throat. Dimly I saw the flutter of her shawl and her arms went around him. A whisper passed through the group. Dark faces pressed forward asking, "Who is it?" while other voices answered, "Carlos Marquez, you remember him."

The man with the lantern came toward us. *"Buenas noches,"* he greeted.

Calling the man by name, Carlos extended his hand and said, "I am back for the Easter season. Back with *querida tía* in Pecos. This is my friend. Are we late for the service? The Hermano Mayor—?"

"Come with me," said the man.

Carlos motioned to me to follow. We stepped to the clearing of the *morada* yard, and our guide stopped near the crosses. Here he asked us to wait. He took a few steps, hesitated and then came back requesting Carlos to accompany him.

"Wait here," Carlos whispered to me.

I watched the two walk quickly toward the dark chapel of the Brothers Penitent. As they neared it, the door opened mysteriously as if the Brothers had a secret way of keeping an eye on the forbidden premises. The doorkeeper stepped out through the yellow rectangle of light to speak to them. Behind him I caught sight of half-naked men kneeling on the *morada* ground. Again the door opened and out came a tall man dressed in black and wearing a white bandanna around his forehead. This was probably the Hermano Mayor. He shook hands with Carlos. Then the men held a conference in voices hushed and animated.

Occasionally they glanced in my direction and as I stood in this no man's land between the dark rim formed by the women and the darker *morada,* a feeling of remoteness from the world overcame me. Santa Fe was a thousand miles away. The college campus where I had met Carlos Marquez was a hazy dream. This was no longer America. I was standing in an ancient land of mystery and suspense, an intruder into the premises of suspicious and sullen strangers. Theirs was another culture, another language, another belief and, as far as I was concerned at this moment, another world.

Apprehensively I kept my eyes on these Brothers Penitent and Carlos Marquez. At last Carlos turned and came toward me. The Hermano Mayor and the doorkeeper went back into the *morada* and the door closed upon them.

"We must wait here," Carlos whispered.

"Will they let us in?"

He shook his head. "Not now," he cautioned. "But we are no longer hiding from any guards. We are *here.*"

I took courage from his confident tone. "You know these people well, don't you?" I remarked.

"Very well. This is where my uncle lived for many years. The woman to whom I spoke is a sister of my aunt in Pecos."

"Almost another *querida tía,*" I said.

Carlos nodded and smiled. "She has a grandson a little younger than I," he told me. "Miguel is very important in the Brotherhood. You will see him. And—" his voice was steadfast—"what we saw last night from a distance, we will now see from close by."

His words were punctuated by a remembered sound. A familiar chant was rising from within the adobe walls: "Come and repent. Come, weep and suffer. Come and show God that you are sorry for sin!"

Carlos stepped back as if fearing that he might be drawn into the service by the allurement of the voices. The circle of women and children moved forward so that we were almost part of the group. The door of the *morada* opened. I knew at once what Carlos meant when he said, "We will now see from close by." The emerging figures of the Brothers Penitent, their faces set, their dark features glistening in the light of the lanterns, the whips clutched in their hands, were almost within our reach. What we had seen through the filmy twilight of the desert on the previous night was being replayed before our eyes. We stood, as it were, at the edge of a stage on which a prologue to torture was being dramatized. The proscenium for this stark enactment was a ghastly arch formed by a half-dozen lanterns in the hands of marching men.

A cactus whip cut the air with a seering, agonizing hiss. When it fell with its merciless crack, a dozen or more whippers began their ritual of penance. In a matter of moments thirty or forty men started a staggering march around the building, whipping themselves over their bare shoulders at every measured step. The bristling *disciplinas* swept horribly close to us. Some flashed brightly in the lantern light, showing that metal barbs or bits of tin had been woven into the strands. Real? These whips were made for torture. They were swung in rhythm over the shoulders while the bodies twisted in a kind of serpentine dance. The chanting men and the lantern bearers walked so near to us that we had to move out of their way.

Carlos stood with his hands clasped in front of his body. Lifting his head, he fixed his gaze on something distant and unattainable within the marchers, sharing vicariously the memory as well as the torture of this wrathful worship.

All about us the crowd of onlookers murmured faint prayers and edged closer. They were links in a human chain being drawn tightly around the whippers. The faces of the children were blank and staring. Frequently the spectators cringed as if the whips were falling upon them. Penitente passion was overpowering reason in them and in me as well. There was a hypnotic spell in the flash and sound of the *disciplinas;* an infectious throb in the chant and in the mumbled prayers.

Near us, moving back and forth among the marchers, was a young Penitente. He had not been whipping himself, but now he suddenly fell to his knees. In a loud voice he cried out for someone to hear his confession. The Hermano Mayor strode over to where he knelt. A lantern bearer hurried to the Hermano's side as other men joined them. The whippers took no notice, but all of us fixed our attention on the impromptu spectacle. Out of the circle of men enclosing the young novice rose his frequent cry of *"Penitencia,"* and through the ritual of self-torture going on around him came a confession of sins.

Then the officials stepped aside. I could now see the young man lying face downward on the ground, arms outstretched. A strong man with a whip stepped forward. Like an executioner he stood with his hands gripping the braided scourge. He raised the whip and laid it with a killing blow upon the young man's bare back. Again the strands swept back and shrieked downward to brand the olive-colored skin with crimson streaks. Carlos straightened like a wire suddenly drawn taut. He clenched his hands. I could hear his quick gasp amid the charivari of agonized sounds. For a moment I thought that he might leap forward to stop the torture. But he did nothing. The young sufferer, having received seven blazing stripes across his back, now lay quivering on the ground.

Carlos turned to me, his black eyes burning into mine in search of my reaction to this tragic scene. Struggling for self-control, he said, "It is Miguel, the one I told you about."

I could not answer. For me the bloody night of Don Juan de Oñate was being relived in all of its historic awfulness. Who would believe it? I could hardly convince myself that it was true even though occasional drops of blood spattered on us from the swinging whips.

The incredible ritual continued for about two hours before the exhausted, bleeding men stumbled back into the *morada.* The lantern bearers, with the exception of one who remained at the door, also re-entered the forbidding chapel, and Miguel walked in slowly, surrounded by the Brothers of Light.

Carlos said laconically, "It was a good penance. There will be prayers now and tomorrow will be the day of Calvary."

He told me this because he thought we ought to stay in the village overnight. The Good Friday service would give me a better understanding of the people's life and worship. I agreed. After all it was for this that I had come to this land of the "self-crucifiers." The elderly woman, who was the sister of Carlos' *querida tía,* prepared a comfortable pallet for me on the floor in her two-room home. I lay for a long time seeing in the flicker of the tiny candle a parade of dark-skinned men with lacerated backs. Their expressions of suffering were hauntingly beatific, yet agonized. I saw Carlos Marquez with lifted head as if he heard the invitation, "Come and repent. Come, weep for your sins." Mystery and questioning were mingled with a consciousness of complete submission as I listened for sounds in the eerie stillness that came over the village after the midnight hour.

What were my honest convictions? Was I glad that in my Protestant tradition nothing akin to physical suffering was expected of me? Did I really think that in this self-torture of *Los Hermanos,* reprehensible and preposterous though it might be, there did actually exist something redemptive? Bluntly I told myself that these men were ignorant and sadistic; deep within me I knew there was something else. I recalled how, after the whippings had stilled and the solemn chants were over, Carlos had introduced me to his cousin upon whom had descended the sacred fire of the whips.

Miguel had little to say, but not because of my presence or his limited knowledge of English; he had a single, deep-seated assurance: "It was a good and cleansing pain." Chiding myself for having been impressed by the observance of such a pagan rite, I blew out the candle and tried to sleep.

Carlos came to the house at eight o'clock the next morning, having spent the night with Miguel.

"You didn't sleep much," I observed.

"No," he admitted. "We talked." He repeated this to the señora in Spanish, adding, "It is a gloomy morning."

"You will stay for today?" she asked hopefully.

"We will stay today," Carlos told her. "Then we must go back. My friend will have learned enough about *Los Hermanos.*"

Her reply was solemn. "The deep things are not learned. They are lived."

Carlos was uneasy throughout the morning; not only in the presence of this stoical woman, but also among the people whom we met in the dingy village street. He obviously felt the alienation caused by his college years. At times he was embarrassed by my presence. Daylight had intensified the fact that I was an outsider—a Penitente-peeper. And I feared that the open door of hospitality would be shut abruptly at any moment. Religion was the bar that would close it fast and secure against my intrusion.

Carlos was more at ease while discussing with the villagers the whereabouts of old friends, the threatening weather or the prospects of spring. Any reference to religion brought back the awkward feeling of estrangement. Good Friday and the observance of Holy Week separated rather than united us.

The faith that Carlos had known and which he no longer professed caused the people to view us across limitless spaces of apprehension. While their words were asking, "How are you, Carlos Marquez? How is your aunt in Pecos?" their thoughts were saying, why did you come to the services? Why did you bring the stranger to spy on us?

Suspicion darkened with the day, but Carlos did his best to be all things to his people and to me. Shortly before noon, he took me to a small adobe dwelling close to the road and introduced me to the Hermano Mayor.

This tall, black-mustached Penitente whom I had seen only in the lantern light was exactly the opposite of what I had expected. He was courteous to the point of affability. Leaning calmly against the faded pink wall of his home, thumbs locked in his belt, he mused, "To the curious our ways are curious." His English was only slightly accented. He gave me the impression that he was well acquainted with life outside the village and wanted to know how Carlos had fared since leaving the region. Commenting on the overcast sky, he observed lightly, "If it rains, you will not get out of here before Easter morning."

Carlos asked, "Would it be possible for my friend to go into the *morada?*"

The Hermano Mayor answered promptly, "Of course. Take him by all means. You should still be able to explain things to him."

His disarming manner assured me that our welcome was official. Carlos and I returned to the *morada.* Standing at the door was a man dressed in black and wearing around his head the white handkerchief of the Brothers of Light. This was the Rezador. He was small and very dark-skinned. His rapid Spanish was as uninterpretable as his hawklike face. His voice was cold and metallic. He never smiled and he looked as if he were satirizing everything that he said. Beneath the white bandanna, penetrating, coal-black eyes were set in narrow, trap-like apertures. They snapped with his words in frightening, nervous glances. His sharp, drawn features were hewn out of the insoluble mystery of a faith that was as proud as he.

Who could figure him out? Was his a timeless patience as he asked Carlos about me, or was he holding himself fiercely in check? Was the black book clasped in his hands held in anger or affection? For a few moments the two men exchanged lightning-fast Spanish phrases. Then unexpectedly Carlos announced, "He says you may go inside."

Surprised, I thanked him; and while the two stayed outside the door, I went into the gloomy, awesome chapel of *Los Hermanos.* At last I stood in the chill surroundings of a Penitente *morada.* It was simply four adobe walls with a dark, low ceiling. Once, long ago, the walls might have been white. They were now dirty and charred. The floor was the rough earth indented with marks left by the knees of the worshipers. Two small windows close to the ceiling grudgingly let in the dismal light of the murky day; they did little to brighten this twelve-by-thirty-foot sanctuary dedicated to the blood of Christ. The air was pungent with the odor of tallow and earth.

At the front was a homemade altar painted a muddy brown and on it stood two crudely carved wooden statues about eighteen inches high. The Virgin and Child and the tortured Christ had been given the honor of brooding over this native shrine. They were decorated with splotches of yellow and red. A row of candles had burned low in patches of wax behind them. In front of them lay the telltale symbol of the Brothers of Light: a coiled whip with multiple strands of braided rope tipped with pieces of wire.

Then I noticed a low door in the wall behind the altar. It was roughhewn, crooked on its hinges and slightly ajar. Through an open space of perhaps two inches I saw only darkness. I listened breathlessly, wondering whether there might be some secret torture going on within. There was no sound. One glimpse would surely do no harm, I thought, and I started toward it. No sooner had I taken a step than I heard the sound of the *morada* door opening. I swung quickly around so that I was facing the altar and made a pretense of examining the homemade statues as the Rezador walked toward me. Behind him was Carlos.

The piercing eyes of the Rezador flashed from me to the mysterious door. He spoke in his swift Spanish, and I gathered that he was demanding to know how trustworthy I was. Carlos now turned to look at the door, and explanations began to fly back and forth with much gesticulating on the part of the Penitente official. Again when I was expecting an order to leave this sepulchral place, the incongruous Rezador strode to the sagging door and planted himself there. To my astonishment Carlos said, "Come. He wants us to go in."

We walked to where the Rezador stood. He opened the door and stood by haughtily. *"Pase usted!"* he commanded.

Carlos and I stooped down and entered. We were in the sacristy of the Brothers Penitent, a dark dungeonlike room with whips of torture hanging on the walls. Some of them were made of yucca, others of rawhide and coarse fiber. Their stubby grips were of wood or leather. As my eyes grew somewhat accustomed to the darkness, I could see that the walls on which the whips hung were besmirched with bloodstains. I moved close to where a black gallows hood hung on the wall.

"Pues acálese usted!" The crisp voice of the Rezador broke into the room.

We were ordered out as quickly as we had entered. The Rezador had deliberately cut short our visit, but now he led us out of the *morada* and around to the other side where, under a lean-to, a clumsy object protruded from a piece of soiled tarpaulin.

The Rezador jerked the covering off and brought to sudden view a low, heavy wooden cart with solid wooden wheels. The plank box was about five by five feet and weighted down with stones. On the board seat was a crudely made image shrouded in black. A shriveled mask tucked inside the black cape leered out at us. Two wooden arms stuck out from beneath the cloth and to these were wired a bow and arrow. This skeletonlike figure faced the front of the cart with the arrow drawn back in its bow.

The Rezador looked at me. Abruptly he said, *"Carreta del muerto."*

"The cart of death," Carlos quickly explained. "A means of special penance."

The Rezador picked up the rope tied around the front axle. Shaking it violently, he said, *"Con este cordel por los hombros van arrastrando la carreta."*

Anxiously I looked at him.

"The Brothers pull the cart with the rope around their bodies," Carlos interpreted.

Greatly relieved, I watched the Rezador pick up the tarpaulin and cover the *carreta del muerto.* His motions were quick and authoritative. Having done his duty, he clasped his book under his arm, made a curt movement with his hand and said an abrupt *"Adios."*

"He must get ready for the service," Carlos explained as the man walked away. Then he called to him, *"Muchas gracias, Hermano."*

There was no answer. The Penitente official did not look back. In silence we returned to the street. The overcast sky, the colorless village and the dark *morada* blended into the mood of the women who kept silent vigil beside their adobe dwellings. Watchful glances were continually cast our way.

"Is it customary that there are no men to be seen?" I asked.

"They are resting," Carlos answered. "But look, there is one."

A Penitente of middle age, half-naked and scarred, came from a dwelling and made his solitary way to the *morada* yard. He glanced at us but was evidently unmindful of our presence, for he passed close by without speaking. Carlos deliberately turned away so as to show no sign of curiosity.

"Who is he?" I inquired.

"I do not know him."

The man approached the *morada.* Putting his thin body under one of the heavy crosses, he lifted it to his shoulder and let the angle of the upright settle into his flesh. Bent under this weight and pain, he began dragging the cross away, walking barefooted in the direction of the Campo Santo, the village burial ground.

Carlos, watching, meditated, "'If any man would be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.'"

"A good text," I agreed, "but does it mean that a man should actually take up a cross like this and—?"

"Why not?" Carlos interrupted in a voice as sharp as the Rezador's. "Why should we always read the easy way into what the Master said?"

I had no answer. Through the cheerless morning the Penitente stumbled onward with his burden. Scripture had its many meanings and therefore the world had its many faiths. The words of Christ had their manifold interpretations and therefore Christians were divided. I did not believe that this passage about cross bearing out of John's Gospel should be taken literally, but the members of *Los Hermanos* did. So, also, from his voice and manner, did Carlos Marquez. He stood looking at the three remaining crosses in the barren yard. He glanced down at himself as if suddenly aware of the gulf that now separated him from his people.

Then he turned quickly. From the distance came the sound of whips. A procession of men flogging themselves steadily over their naked backs was crossing the plaza. Carlos' words were wrung from his recollection, "It is the Procession of Blood."

That, I felt like saying, is what every procession had been. By now the march of Penitentes in their soiled, blood-spattered trunks and their half-nude beaten bodies was printed on my memory as the principal ritual of these fanatical followers of the Third Order. I watched the disordered group advance to the *morada*. On other occasions night had tinged the orgy with a certain romance; daylight made the scene revolting. The kerchief-bandaged heads, the sallow faces, the blotches of dried blood, the swinging whips made me want to turn away.

Why should I stay longer to spy on these primitive practices? The lacerations were real, the wounds deep, the dark bodies of the men strained with pain; so why watch this spectacle all over again? There was one reason: I wanted to know whether *Los Hermanos* carried their torture beyond anything I had seen. Would they actually crucify one of their members? This question held me while the Brothers passed by, put down their whips and entered the *morada.* A crucifixion, I had to confess, was the chief interest that made me eager to crowd into the *morada* with Carlos Marquez.

But now I was seeing *Los Hermanos Penitentes* in a worship service where the whips were still. The men, with backs bruised and bleeding, knelt abjectly on the ground. Others stood or sat while the Rezador, standing in his place near the altar, opened his book. His voice was almost tranquil, and his manner was one of complete submission to some inner prompting. I turned to Carlos. In a hushed voice he was saying, "Now you see the Rezador as he really is. It is not what a man finds in the *morada;* it is what he finds in himself."

The reading was brief and ended quickly. The Hermano Mayor came to the altar and, speaking earnestly in words that I could understand sufficiently to make out, said, "Penance is born in suffering of the body and of the heart. What is the whip if the heart is not broken? What is the cross if the spirit is not bruised? These holy days of the Passion of our Lord are the days of our fellowship with the Master. Blessed is the Brother who praises Jesus with heart and spirit and honors Him anew with the blood of his discipline."

The words continued, falling with impressive sincerity on the worshipers. But for the evidences of the brutish torture, this might have been a somber Holy Week message anywhere in America. The Hermano Mayor sermonized on the urgency of renewed consecration as the means for setting man right with

God and as the only path by which mankind and the world could be saved. He stressed the example of submission to suffering set by Christ and pleaded with his listeners to perpetuate the heritage of the Penitente order.

The words caused Carlos to stand tall and straight against the *morada* wall, proud that this philosophy was inherent in the practice of the blood and the whips; but the Brotherhood responded to the Hermano Mayor's words with moans and murmuring. Then a chant was begun, bringing with it an electrifying impulse of emotion. I expected to see a sudden flailing with the whips, but the Rezador was once more at the altar, reading from his book in a steady voice and evoking from the Brothers Penitent a singsong antiphony.

"Come," Carlos whispered, "it is best we go now."

He led me out, not because the service was over, but because it may have been the only way he could subdue the feeling that had come over him. For such a conquest the out-of-doors was better than the *morada.* In the open air one could escape from the fear of one's impulses. A man could take the good things of the service without feeling that he was fighting against dark adobe walls or offending the sight of candles burning behind the garish saints.

Carlos took a deep breath. "There is not much more to the ceremony," he declared in an offhand way. "The Hermano Mayor spoke well. Could you understand?"

"Yes," I said. "The words are easier to understand than the self-torture."

"It is all one," he remonstrated. "Come, I will take you to the house. Forgive me if I do not eat lunch with you. There is someone I must see."

We started to leave the *morada* yard.

"Listen," Carlos said, as an *Ave Maria* drifted hauntingly from the *morada.* "I have sung it many times."

But he was impatient to be on his way. He paused with me at the house only long enough to report that he would not want anything to eat. Evidently that information had preceded him, for only one plate was set on the small table in the nearly dark room.

The kindly señora was as stolid and silent as before, but one thing she did try to make clear: Carlos would stay in the village until Easter Day.

I wondered about this. Would he have come here at all had it not been for his promise to "get me in"? How strong were the chains of parent religion? How strong were the Holy Week traditions that had forged their links in *my* faith? I thought of the religious ceremonies in the little Wisconsin town where I had been indoctrinated by confirmation on Palm Sunday, Bible readings and family altars, Good Friday with its three-hour service, Holy Saturday and the constant reminder that "Jesus is in the tomb," Easter and the impressive observance of communion with all of us safely under God's wing in the family pew.

Gently these remembrances beckoned, but I asked myself, What if you had been brought up in a Penitente village? What if your father had taken a whip from the *morada* wall? What if you had been taught, "There is no greater merit than to emulate the physical suffering of Christ?" What if you had once been an initiate in the order of *Los Hermanos* and had felt the blows of the whip across your back, and what if out of this experience had come a "cleansing pain"? If I were Carlos

Marquez and had returned to my homeland at the height of Holy Week, what would I do?

I had hours in which to seek the answer to this riddle, hours counted by the slowly moving flare of light trying to break through the obdurate clouds. Then, in late afternoon, I was startled by the scream of a fife piercing the village with a high-pitched, heart-stilling wail. I rushed out into the street and saw the villagers surging toward the *morada.* Feeling sure that I would meet Carlos somewhere along the way, I hastened to join them.

The *morada* grounds were crowded. People were already going in the direction of the Campo Santo, a short quarter of a mile away at the edge of the village. The incessant shriek of the fife lured them on. I could not determine where the sound came from, but it filled the air with specters that seemed all too real. Shrill and prolonged, it was now raising the curtain on an ominous pageant moving into the wasteland. It was not the array of men beating themselves with their whips and mingling groans with their chanting that caused me to flinch; it was the sight of a man stumbling under a heavy cross in the midst of the disorderly procession. His head was covered with a black shroud into which holes had been cut for the eyes. But for his white trunks his body was bare, and his back was a crisscross of bloody wounds.

"Who is it?" I asked a group of youngsters excitedly.

They looked at me suspiciously and turned away. Then a boy spoke up, "They go to *Calvario.*" Pointing to the cross bearer, he cried, *"El Cristo."*

El Cristo meant the Christ, but it also meant the masked figure tensing his body under the fearful weight. It meant the unknown victim who was walking his *via dolorosa* to an American Calvary.

Ahead of him went the Rezador, stubbornly keeping his eyes on his open book. Near by strode the Hermano Mayor with Carlos Marquez at his side. Carlos had discarded his shirt and was barefooted. A white kerchief was tied around his forehead. Ahead of him walked the man with the fife—the Pitero—sending out his siren call across the dark and dismal land. Then followed the Brothers Penitent, some thirty or forty men, their whips silent in deference to the one who bore the cross.

Drawn by the expectation of the incredibly realistic climax to the Passion story, I followed entranced. The proud bearing of Carlos fascinated me as I watched him with *Los Hermanos* ascend the little knoll about a hundred yards from the Campo Santo. This was *Calvario.* Here, yesterday, a cross had stood and I had spied it from afar. The exhausted *El Cristo* now bore that cross or one like it and, before my eyes, fell helplessly with it to the ground. The screech of the fife was stilled.

Members of the Brothers Penitent gathered around "the chosen one." Strong men picked him up and laid him on the crosspiece, stretching out his arms and making straight his legs. Carlos' eyes roved over the spectators until he spied me. He acknowledged my presence with a nod as if to say, "It is good you are here. This is the great moment."

It was a moment of silence and compassion. Wordlessly the crowd watched, transfixed, while men tied the hands and feet of *El Cristo* to the roughhewn cross. Buckskin thongs made his hands stand out like claws. The cross was lifted up. As it was held upright a crown of thorns was pressed down on the sufferer's head. A convulsive shudder went through the youthful body.

Then, for a moment, the cross swayed as the men raised it high and set it into the hole, letting it drop with a sickening thud. *El Cristo* hung by his own weight, a living corpus against an angry sky. Golgotha was lived again on this New Mexico knoll.

Around me people were kneeling. The members of *Los Hermanos* fell to the ground. Women bowed their heads over their rosaries or hid their faces within their black shawls. I knelt down, but I could not take my eyes from the cross. Only the Hermano Mayor and the Rezador remained standing. Occasionally they looked up to watch the painful intake of breath and the shrouded head sink downward. From the kneeling group, a tender chant rose caressingly:

"Christ is now dead
And all are worth saving.
Give him your soul
For which He is calling."

The endlessly long moments passed while the chant droned on. *El Cristo* in his gallows mask hung limp and apparently unconscious. Twenty minutes had been an eternity. The shadows of late afternoon were darkest night.

Then the Hermano Mayor said, "It is enough." The Brothers of Light lifted the cross from its setting and held it like a pallet on which *El Cristo* lay. In a soundless retreat they started back to the *morada.* Walking thoughtfully beside the cross was Carlos. Frequently he looked down at the silent figure as if noting that the wrists were still tied and that neither the mask nor the thorns had been removed.

Halfway along the way of the march a chant was begun. It grew exultant as *Los Hermanos* entered the *morada* yard. When the procession reached the door it was a triumph song, and victoriously the cross bearers tilted the cross so that both it and the "crucified" could be taken inside.

The singing men followed the motionless form into the sepulchral darkness of the *morada,* but Carlos did not enter. He found me in the group of spectators and came to where I stood.

"I should have come for you," he apologized.

"I understand," I told him.

Indicating the *morada,* he said, "I was with him."

"El Cristo?"

He nodded and moved slightly away from the crowd.

"Is he all right?" I asked.

"Yes." His answer was confident. "He will be well taken care of. It is a great sacrificial act, don't you think?"

"There is no doubt about that," I had to say. "An unforgettable symbol. And whoever is *El Cristo* surely never forgets his experience."

His answer was almost inaudible. "That is true. When a man has been *El Cristo* he always remembers. It is something that never leaves him."

I resisted an impulse to look at him in astonishment and new understanding. Hesitantly I ventured, "This time it was Miguel, wasn't it?"

He did not answer. Politely evasive, he said, "I am planning to stay here for a day or two. You will understand?"

"Of course."

"There is not much more to see," he went on. "Only the *Tineiblas.* That is the next service and it commemorates the resurrection. You could stay for that."

"More whippings?" I asked. "Or are those over now?"

He shrugged impersonally, then said with a smile, "Maybe there will be one more. That would not hurt anyone, do you think?"

"Not if he is strong and willing," I said, capturing his mood. "Not if the world doesn't get in the way."

"I wonder," he mused as we walked in the direction of my car, "I wonder what you will think of all this when you get to your home. What will you say?"

"That is not the question," I replied. "The question is: what would I think of it if I had ever been *El Cristo* and had been lifted up on *Calvario?"*

"Si, si!" Carlos agreed with a low cry. "That is the biggest question of all! For then you would know what physical suffering does to one."

To that, what could I say, since I had never had the sentiment, the courage or the Holy Faith to try it and see?

CHAPTER VI

THE SWEDENBORGIAN

(THE NEW CHURCHMAN)

On a morning in early fall a gentleman walked into my office at the State University of Iowa. I judged from his clericals that he was an Episcopalian and from his appearance that he was about fifty-five years old. I was wrong on both counts. He was a Swedenborgian and seventy. His name was John L. Boyer.

"Is there anything in the teaching of the New Church that keeps a man looking so young?" I asked.

"Why, yes," he said with enthusiasm. " A healthy philosophy means a healthy mind in a healthy body."

"Did Swedenborg say that?"

"I am sure he implied it" was the confident response. "He did say that the life of everyone, whether man, spirit or angel, flows in from the Lord Himself who is Life. That is a well-known teaching. 'Life diffuses itself through the universal heaven, also through hell, and thus into every individual therein, according to an order and a series that are incomprehensible. But the Life that flows in is received by everyone according to his character at the present moment.' Our character is woven into permanency by constant rearrangement of ideas and mental images."

He paused as if checking his eagerness to preach a sermon on that Swedenborgian concept. Then he said, "Would you accept a few booklets from me? I am told that you have many students here who are interested in various faiths. They will find these publications fascinating, and so will you."

While he spoke he opened his briefcase and laid on my desk several attractively bound pamphlets: "Revelation through the Ages," "True Christian Religion," "Swedenborg's Vision of the Future Life."

"I think you could do my students more good," I told him, "by letting them see what a Swedenborgian looks like."

"That I should be happy to do," he said with enthusiasm. "People have many strange ideas about us who follow the teachings of the New Church. Some think we are spiritualists. Some wonder whether we actually believe in Jesus Christ. Others think we are opposed to churches. Yes, I should like very much to meet your students any time."

He placed several more books and pamphlets before me. One of the titles caught my eye: *My Religion* by Helen Keller. I picked up the paper-bound volume somewhat reverently, for throughout my life this remarkable American woman had been an almost legendary figure. The frontispiece was a picture of Miss Keller and bore a well-known quotation: "If you can enjoy the sun and flowers and music where there is nothing except darkness and silence you have proved the Mystic Sense."

I paged through *My Religion* wondering how this two-hundred-page testimony could have remained hidden during my college and seminary years. How had I missed the setting for the familiar words which Miss Keller incorporated into her tribute to Swedenborg? She testified:

> His message has traveled like light side by side with the new science, the new freedom, and the new society. . . . As I wander through the dark, encountering difficulties, I am aware of encouraging voices that murmur from the spirit realm. I sense a holy passion pouring down from the springs of Infinity. I thrill to music that beats with the pulses of God. Bound to suns and planets by invisible cords, I feel the flame of eternity in my soul. Here, in the midst of the everyday air, I sense the truth of eternity in my soul. Here, in the midst of the everyday air, I sense the truth of ethereal rains. I am conscious of the splendour that binds all things of earth to all things of heaven. Immured by silence and darkness, I possess the light which shall give me vision a thousandfold when death sets me free.

And on another page: "I plunge my hands deep into my large Braille volumes containing Swedenborg's teachings, and withdraw them full of the secrets of the spiritual world."

I lingered over these words, feeling their quality of greatness and depth, as if I could draw from them faith for my needs as well.

Emanuel Swedenborg had meant nothing more to me than a name on the outer fringe of the institutionalized churches, an iconoclast and a quixotic character, half heretic and half myth. In a hazy way he was caught in my memory along with Dante, Leonardo da Vinci and Jules Verne. He had crept into my library by way of Eliot's *Five-Foot Shelf* and into my mind by Ripley's "Believe It or Not." It was Ripley who popularized the fact that Swedenborg at the age of twenty invented a machine gun, designed a boat that would travel under water, and made the model of a ship that would fly in the air. This I always thought was remarkable, for Swedenborg lived nearly three centuries ago. He was born in Stockholm on January 29, 1688, and died in London in 1772.

Now, from the literature which Boyer put before me, I learned that not only did Helen Keller sing the praises of this Swedish genius, but a familiar figure, Joseph Fort Newton, declared, "There has never before nor since been a mind like that of Swedenborg." He was an eminent psychologist, linguist, hydrographer, mineralogist, cosmologist and aeronautical engineer. The Swedish government honored him as the greatest of all metallurgists and called him the forerunner of all Scandinavian geologists. As a mathematician he headed the department at the University of Uppsala. As a physicist he "expounded the nebular hypothesis of the formation of the planets long before Kant"; as a chemist he was credited with the establishment of a system of crystallography; as a biologist he discovered the function of the ductless glands.

In the dazzling light of such distinctions Edwin Markham called him "one of the greatest intellects that has ever appeared upon this planet," and a long list of other notables underlined this opinion. Yet these men were not thinking of Swedenborg's scientific accomplishments only, they were saying that his greatest contribution to life and thought was in the realm of the spiritual. The accumulation of his encyclopedic knowledge and creative work was but the promontory from which he reached out to the allurement of the unknown.

Boyer said, "I will appreciate it if you accept these books. No strings attached. Ever since I was introduced to the theology and philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg, I have made it a point to share him with others. He is soul-satisfying."

"Are you a recent convert?"

"It seems like only yesterday that I became interested in the New Church. But actually it happened over thirty years ago. I have been a clergyman for almost fifty years."

"In which denomination?"

"Denominations," Boyer replied with a smile. "I have always been on a spiritual quest and there have always been many questions."

"Such as?" I prompted.

"Such as 'What is faith? What is good? How and why did evil originate? How much can a man know about God? How can the blood of Christ save me?' "

"And Swedenborg has provided you with the answers?"

"Completely," he said with assurance.

"What did you mean when you said 'denominations'?"

"My mother was a stanch Baptist," my visitor reminisced. "As religious mothers often do, she urged me to go into the ministry. The Baptist ministry. But my grandparents were Lutherans and, as religious grandparents often do, they also urged me to go into the ministry. The Lutheran ministry."

"So I suppose you became a Presbyterian!"

"First a Congregationalist," he corrected. "My training was at Oberlin."

"Weren't your questions answered there?" I asked.

"No, they were not," he confided, "although I had some very fine instructors. Particularly Henry Churchill King. In lieu of answers to my religious confusion, he interested me intensely in the 'social gospel.' I even joined the Social Christianity movement, a plan for the betterment of the laboring classes. Possibly it was a workable idea, but it lacked the power flowing from a Christian spirit. Social conditions are not changed from without. They are changed from a change in heart, and that was something I had not yet experienced for myself. I suppose there are many people teaching and preaching about experiences which they have never experienced."

"Were you a minister," I asked, "during the days you championed the cause of the social gospel?"

"Yes. I had been serving as pastor in a United Evangelical Church. Then I changed to the Methodist denomination. I was suffering from a divine discontent. How can a man preach if he doesn't have the answers? In every profession—medicine, science, industry—the leaders are supposed to have the know-how. But while I was in the ministry people would often come to me with theological interpretations that almost convinced me they were right and I was wrong. What if a doctor of medicine were so uncertain? What if a chemist were so indefinite? A parishioner would say, 'Mr. Preacher, how does God operate to unite the finite with the Infinite?' or 'What happens to a soul after death?' What was I to say? Seek the Scriptures? Bless you, I had been seeking the Scriptures from the direction of half a dozen different denominations and I was more at sea than ever."

"So you found Swedenborg?"

"No," he said, "I left the ministry and went into social work."

"I suppose that is a very practical form of ministry."

"Perhaps," Boyer reflected, "but for a man to heal the sick, to feed the hungry and really to help people as Jesus instructed us to do, implies that a man should first have the spiritual qualifications as well as the material resources. You see, disorder and evil have been brought down to us through thousands of generations by false thinking and wrongdoing. Thus by heredity and by our own acquired evils we have so separated ourselves from the Divine Life that we no longer recognize our spiritual need."

"That makes Swedenborg sound very modern," I said.

"He is always our contemporary," Boyer assured me. "He says that good and truth are received as good and truth by the good. By the evil, good and truth are received as evil and falsity. They are, he maintains, like the light of the sun which diffuses itself into all objects but is received according to the quality of each object. They take on a beautiful color in beautiful forms and an ugly color in ugly forms. Swedenborg was all for social service and so am I. But right thinking and right living are the things that will change conditions. Without these a man is not getting at the root causes."

"So you left social work?"

"I volunteered for Red Cross work on the foreign field during World War I. Later I tried farming. Then along came a great new American business institution, the chain-store idea. Here I felt I could sublimate my religious energy in chain grocery stores! I threw myself into the work and will have to say that I made more money than I ever made before or since. Then I got to be a chain-store district superintendent," he explained with a laugh. "There is nothing religious about the title. I had charge of twenty stores. But a man can be happy nowhere if there is confusion in his heart and mind. He can be happy anywhere with a philosophy that answers his questions.

"I grant you that there are some people who go through life untouched and unbothered by a spiritual groping, but these people are few. The many who think about life at all and who want to put the most into life, as well as get the most out of it, want to know what to believe."

"Were you alone in this quest or did your wife share the same interest?"

"We all shared it. I have a daughter and two sons. A man's family enters into the picture all right. I felt it was necessary for me to make money. To return to the ministry would have meant a great financial sacrifice. Besides, what would I preach? I suppose only someone who has been in the active ministry can understand the dilemma of a man who gives up his pulpit. He may be very successful in the business world, but he feels the sense of great loss. He may think he is free, but there is a great void in his life. I am sure that the man who puts his hand to the plow has committed himself to a duty from which he can never reasonably escape. Mrs. Boyer and I often talked it over."

"Wondering whether you would be happier in the ministry without a message than you would be in 'the world' without following your call?"

"Exactly," Boyer agreed. "Then Providence stepped in. Swedenborg says that Providence is God in action in human life. My wife and I were living in Maumee, Ohio, and near us lived a woman who was a Swedenborgian. Every time we saw her, which was frequently, I heard Swedenborgian doctrine until I wished she would stay away. This may seem strange since I have just been telling you of my hunger and discontent, but, you see, I was not spiritually ready to receive these new and profound ideas. I was, unconsciously, holding to my own preconceived notions about what *I* thought the Bible should mean and what *I* considered God's way for me. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Well," I said, unwilling to frame an answer for him, "how is a man finally convinced that his own ideas are not God's ideas? How did this neighbor convert you to Swedenborgian belief?"

"One day Mrs. Boyer said, 'This woman has invited us so often and so persistently, I think it would be little more than courteous for us to go with her to a service.' I protested, but one Sunday we went together to a little Swedenborgian church in Toledo. The service did not differ greatly from that in any Protestant church. The Litany and the songs and the Psalter were somewhat 'high church,' I thought. I was surprised. I expected the Swedenborgians to be holding séances or some such thing. There was nothing exceptional about the minister either. But when he began to preach I knew almost instantly that I was not only in a New Church, I was hearing a new gospel."

"What do you mean?"

"Through all these years that sermon has never left me. It was based on the Garden of Eden story. The minister wasted no time in discussing the authorship of the narrative or in wondering whether or not the historical position was correct. Without formalities he explained what the Lord was trying to reveal. He told us the *inner meaning* of the story. He led us into the true character of the Bible. I was shown that God was here accommodating His instructions to the state of man and to the state of angels.

"For the first time a story I had heard from boyhood and which I knew from memory teemed with life and lessons for my understanding of the relationship of God to man. Oh, there was much to learn and so much to unlearn! I was soon beating a path to the doors of the little church in Toledo."

"Did the minister guide you in your search from there on?"

"Indeed he did. He, too, had been a convert to the New Church."

"And Mrs. Boyer?"

"She shared my discovery. I had a secret wish to go to a

New Church Theological School. Educational training is centered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and there I wanted to go. We held a family council and the decision that I should go was unanimous. Father was slated to begin a new religious life at forty."

"Providence?" I asked.

"Unquestionably!" vowed Boyer firmly and the ring of enthusiasm in his voice told me that his life belonged in the pattern of my other questing friends. Once more, in his appraisement, I saw the phenomenon of conversion to a lesser-known faith. The teachings of Swedenborg had made old things new, had fired his zeal, had transformed his life by the renewing of his mind.

As he spoke of the "awakening" that came to him and as he talked of his search in Methodism, he made me see Wesley and Swedenborg vying for his spiritual commitment just as they had held out their spiritual concepts to the world of their time. These two dominant figures had walked through the eighteenth century side by side. They were prophets in the days of Rousseau and John Woolman, Goethe and Boswell, William Blake and Isaac Newton; days of the Quakers and Shakers and Lollards and Waldensians; of Pietists and Quietists; of the Illuminati and the Rosicrucians; of witches and inquisitions.

Great numbers turned to Wesley and his gospel of repentance and personal dedication; others found in Swedenborg the suggestion that knowledge is empty without a knowledge of God, and wisdom is futile without divine revelation. That was how Boyer had weighed the matter in his twentieth-century search and Swedenborg won him over heart, soul and mind.

"The two years of study at the New Church seminary," he said, "were among the most rewarding of my life. Mrs. Boyer and I had at last found our way out of the jungle of creeds and questioning. We had come upon a clearly blazed trail and it was like coming out of darkness into light. At last we had a philosophy for ourselves and a message for others. We were ready to 'go and teach all nations.'"

"But did the nations want to be taught?" I asked.

"They did not," he answered promptly. "My colleagues of the past ridiculed me. Business associates looked at me as if I had joined the lunatic fringe. 'Swedenborg?' they asked. 'Who's he? The New Church? What's that? The *Arcana Coelestia?* How do you spell it?' We were put down as rank spiritualists and dilettantes. Even my relatives had only pity for me and my family. But we were happy. We had found God."

"There's always the big question," I ventured to say, "whether you could not have found the same faith in one of the many denominations with which you were associated along the way? Isn't it simply a matter of deep searching discovery? Isn't the God of the Swedenborgians the God of all faiths?"

"Let me put it this way," Boyer replied. "There are many locks on the door of truth, but only Swedenborg among modern men has the master key."

"Which means—?"

"Psychologically, philosophically, theologically, he has all the answers."

"A true prophet, then?"

"And a true seer. They say he was a spiritualist. Let us say that in the best sense of the word he was. He communed with angels. He lived in two worlds at the same time. Until he appeared on the religious scene, theologians had not yet discovered the fact that every man functions on two entirely separate planes of life, the natural and the spiritual. I grant you the idea has been expressed by others, but it has never been explained."

"Can it be explained so that the average man may grasp it?"

"Of course it can, though Swedenborg is neither easy to comprehend nor popular. But in thinking of life on two planes let us approach it from the external world and see whether it does not begin to make sense. Swedenborg says, 'The life of anyone can by no means be changed after death.' Think of that for a moment. Doesn't that mean that here on earth we are already living in a spiritual realm?"

"You mean to say that a bad man must always be bad and a good man always good?"

"I mean that after death there is no miraculous transformation. Swedenborg states that the mind of man is his spirit which lives after death and that spirit is already in company with its like in the spiritual world. We are living, if you wish to put it so, both *here* and *there* NOW."

"But," I asked, "what hope has a man if he cannot change from evil to good even in the spirit world?"

"You do not understand. Man always has the chance to be good, both in this life and in the life to come. Evil exists because God endowed man with a free will. If a man deliberately makes evil his good and good his evil, then he creates his own hell and does not desire heaven. Man is not sent to hell; he goes there willingly and by his own volition. In the same manner he writes his own passport to heaven. All this, it seems to me, is fair enough. A man can be changed from evil to good, but he must begin in this world, which is, after all, a seminary for heaven. A man can take with him only what is spiritually prepared in him here and now, else he would not be himself 'over there.' "

"As I understand it, Swedenborgians believe that each of us already has his counterpart in the unseen world. At death the counterpart becomes the real."

"It always was the real. The body is necessary only as a vehicle by which the spirit may be manifested in a physical world. When a man dies, his spiritual body goes on just as it has here on earth. It goes on in an intermediate realm, a kind of nether world of the spirits where the process of spiritual evolution or devolution carries on.

"Redemption means simply that man has a chance to apply Christ's character in his own life and to use Christ's spirit in overcoming temptation and holding his life in harmony with the will of God. But, of course, the first step in his redemption is the recognition that all is not well with him—that something indeed is very wrong. He carefully analyzes himself—his motives, his conduct, his general attitude toward life and his fellow man—and he finally cries out, 'Oh Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!' At this very instant his regeneration begins."

"That," I suggested, "is somewhat different from the explanation of redemption in the orthodox sense."

"Perhaps," Boyer mused, "but truth is what we must live by."

"And Swedenborg is that truth?"

"The Word of God is. And Swedenborg is its true revelator. Are you willing to make the investigation?"

"I am surely more than willing to read some of these books," I assured him.

Boyer smiled and said, "Well, that's something. But, of course, there is also the *Arcana Coelestia* and the complete Swedenborg library——"

"Which," I interrupted, "will take a lifetime of study."

"I can think of no better way to spend a life," Boyer rejoined, and there was no question but that he meant it. He lived and breathed Swedenborgianism. To him the Swedish seer did have the master key and his door to truth had been opened wide.

"There is one thing I wish you would do," he said. "One of these days there will be a service at a little Swedenborg church near Norway, Iowa. I should like to invite you to attend that service."

"I'll not only do that," I promised, "I will bring some of my students with me."

"Good!" he exclaimed.

"But don't convert them all to the New Church," I warned with a laugh. "These young people have a faith."

"Of course," he agreed. "Hasn't everyone? That is one interesting feature about Swedenborg. His teachings will help and supplement the beliefs of people of *every faith.*"

Those were familiar words. I had heard them whenever I met followers of the "lesser-known" religions. None were more emphatic than the Swedenborgians in the assertion that here was an indispensable ingredient which all religions ought to incorporate in their teachings. Yet, when a man became a true follower—and John Boyer proved the point—he automatically committed himself and his loyalties to the New Church. The "old church" no longer satisfied. Yet, I was confident that there would be no wholesale conversion when I took a group of my students on a pilgrimage to a Swedenborgian service.

Before we went I made it a point to meet other Swedenborgians in near-by cities. They were few. The churches were always small in membership. But whenever I interviewed the people I found them possessed of an inner flame and stirred by the exciting adventure of a quest which to me was only a confused labyrinth of passages connecting this world and the spiritual realms.

But even though I did not understand, the followers were confident that someday the light would break upon me. They said that the heart of Swedenborg's contribution to world religions and to the life of man was his interpretation of the Scriptures. He was pictured to me as a daring prospector exploring the mines of Holy Writ and panning out the hidden truths. He had gone further in this than any other man and claimed that the Scriptures showed not only God's acts but God's designs. He elevated the Bible from a divine record to a divine idea.

This was vague until the day I sat in on a discussion between Mr. Boyer and a fundamentalist, the Reverend Otto Troth. Pastor Troth had heard that the New Church took the Bible more literally than did the Evangelicals. A conference was arranged and I appointed myself as auditor to meet with the men in the comfortable library of Mr. Boyer's home. It was not only the Boyer home, officially it was the Swedenborg Philosophical Centre adjacent to the campus of the University of Chicago. Mr. Boyer was, at the time, the director of the Centre.

Troth, the plaintiff, forty-five, bespectacled, with the square jaw of orthodoxy, sat in a straight-backed chair. He took his place poised for pouncing righteously, but amiably, upon any evidence of heresy. Mr. Boyer sat confidently behind his businesslike desk. Backed by a towering shelf of Swedenborgian volumes, he seemed to enjoy and thoroughly appreciate the role of defendant.

The first entry in my notebook was Pastor Troth's challenge, "Do you consider the Bible an inspired book?"

"Do we?" exclaimed Boyer. "If we don't, who does? We believe there is holiness in every sentence, in every word and in every letter!"

"I'm glad to hear that," Troth declared. "I always thought you Swedenborgians twisted Scripture to suit your needs, saying that one part is inspired and another is not. You do take it literally, then?"

"Certainly. But, of course, when we have done that we have only scratched the surface. The literal sense of the Word is the basis and foundation upon which the spiritual meaning rests. It opens the gates. The internal sense is the *life* that takes us into heaven. The real message lies within the literal Word."

Pastor Troth lifted his eyebrows. "I beg your pardon?"

Our defendant leaned eagerly across the desk. "Let us take a simple illustration," he suggested. "What would you say is meant by the Seventh Commandment?"

" 'Thou shalt not steal'?" replied the pastor promptly. "That I can give you straight out of my catechism. 'God forbids every kind of robbery, theft and fraud, as well as sinful longing for anything that belongs to our neighbor.' "

"Very good," said Mr. Boyer with enthusiasm. "That is surely right according to the *natural* meaning. But, you see, Mr. Troth, that is only a mere one third of it. Scripture has not only a natural meaning, but also a *spiritual* and a *celestial* meaning."

"Oh, well," Troth responded, "our catechism has further things to say about the Seventh Commandment, too. It warns us that not only should we not steal from our neighbor but we should help him to improve and protect his property and business. Everyone knows that any text has unlimited implications."

"How unlimited?"

Troth was emphatic. "Covering every possible moral, ethical and prophetic interpretation."

"No more than that?" asked our Swedenborgian.

"I think," said Troth conclusively, "if we take care of that we all have quite an assignment."

"Agreed" came the reply, "but we still have considered only the *natural* meaning. The natural meaning is like the husk, the spiritual meaning is the seed, and the celestial is the germ within the seed. When men say, 'Thou shalt not steal,' they think in terms of goods and substance. But a spiritual being knows that these words mean one should not deprive others of their faith and charity. And a *celestial* being understands that he should not attribute to himself whatever is the Lord's, nor claim for himself the things which belong to God's righteousness and merit."

"Spiritual beings and celestial beings!" complained Pastor Troth. "Terms like that make me think of spirits in another world."

"That," said Mr. Boyer, "is exactly what I mean."

Troth folded his arms in defiance. "Go on," he dared, and a good-humored glance in my direction told me he would soon have this case closed and the defendant ready for the sentence.

"You do believe in spirits and angels, Mr. Troth?" came the question.

"I'm not a spiritualist," Pastor Troth made clear. "But let's keep to the subject. What do you mean when you say the Bible has a message for spiritual beings and celestial beings? Obviously you mean that it has a message for our spiritual nature. Why not say so and then we can at least agree on terms?"

"Because that is not what I mean" was the reply. "I mean that the Bible is actually God's Word for spirits and for angels as well as for men. If we forget this we make the Bible limited and human. I am sure, Mr. Troth, you will agree that it is limitless and divine."

The pastor was honestly amazed. He studied the speaker for a long moment and then said, "You mean to sit there and tell me that you Swedenborgians believe that spirits in heaven read the Bible?"

"Spirits and angels," said Mr. Boyer with assurance. "Why not? Isn't the Word of God eternal? Didn't the Lord say that heaven and earth should pass away but that His Word should never pass away?"

"But," argued Pastor Troth, "you are talking about something that is entirely symbolical——"

"Oh, no, I'm not" came the warning. "I will give you a New Church doctrine, but follow it closely, for it is not easy. The Word of God is *celestial.* That means it proceeds from Divine Love and is Divine Good. It is known in this respect by the angels in the highest or third heaven and they understand it according to their station. Then the Word of God is *spiritual.* Here it proceeds from Divine wisdom and is Divine truth. The spirits in the second or middle heaven understand it according to their station. And then the Word of God is *natural,* meaning that it proceeds from Divine knowledge and we mortals understand it according to our station."

Pastor Troth furrowed his brows.

"The Word of God," Boyer continued, "actually proceeds only from God's Divine Love or Good. As it descends through the heavens from its celestial source, it accommodates itself so as to be understood by all who are in a spiritual endeavor. There is but one proceeding, there is an infinite variety in its reception."

Pastor Troth came out of his hopeless involvement with a cry, "By heavens, you talk about these worlds as if they were as real as our own!"

"They are," said our defendant with complete conviction. "Swedenborg penetrated these three stations and revealed not only what man discovers in them, but also what spirits and celestial beings find in them. And that is why he could penetrate the inner meaning of the Word. He revealed that all of these meanings are interwoven and interrelated and that there is a union between the Bible's external and internal nature. The Word comes from God, touches and satisfies the various degrees of spiritual beings and then reaches man with what Swedenborg called a foretaste of heavenly arcana. This interrelation of meaning is called the science of correspondences."

"Amazing" was Troth's dubious comment. "Absolutely amazing. And now I suppose we must all be Swedenborgians before we can ever hope to comprehend the Bible."

"That," said Mr. Boyer, "is what I have been saying for years. To whom else shall we go?"

"To whom did Swedenborg go?" Pastor Troth wanted to know.

"To God."

"Then we can all go to God in the same way."

"No, Mr. Troth, it doesn't seem to work that way. God apparently calls certain men, or else certain men know how to call Him. Swedenborg had visions and revelations. I have never experienced any, have you? He communed with angels, but that has never happened to me. He lived in two worlds at once, the material and the spiritual."

"Now, come, come," chided the pastor. "You're an intelligent man——"

"No—" our Swedenborgian sighed—"I'm afraid I'm not." He swung around in his chair and looked up at the shelves of books. *"There* was an intelligent man," he mused. "Those three shelves, Emanuel Swedenborg. Not Swedenborg the scientist, but Swedenborg the man of God."

Troth looked up. The volumes made a noticeable impression on him. He had always had an insatiable desire to write, but all he had to show for it was a book of sermons. His eyes lingered on the shelves. They were long shelves, six feet across, and the books were packed in closely.

"I apologize," said Mr. Boyer, "for having illustrated the science of correspondences with so slight an example as the Seventh Commandment. This row of books does it better. Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia.* Twelve volumes. Seven thousand pages."

He ran his finger across the row of books.

"The *Arcana Coelestia* is Swedenborg's most important work. In these pages he unfolds the internal meaning of Genesis and Exodus. Look at them sometime. They are fascinating and when one knows something of the science of correspondences the Bible is a new book."

"Probably so new," said Troth, "that nobody will want to read it."

"Or so new and wonderful that everyone will" was the reply. "Swedenborg has shown me that the Bible is the greatest book not only in this life, but also in the life to come. You may think I'm overly sentimental or perhaps even superstitious, but since the magnitude of it was revealed to me, I look on it with absolute awe. I never allow anything to be put on top of the Holy Bible. I never place another book on it or even my glasses—or anything, in fact. To do that would be sacrilege."

Pastor Troth nodded understandingly. "I agree with you there," he said. "We ought to show the Bible due reverence even if we don't actually worship it. You Swedenborgians don't worship it, do you?"

"Well," said our friend earnestly, "what is worship? Swedenborg said that true worship originated not with man, but with God."

"The trouble with a man like Swedenborg," Troth observed, "is that one never quite knows what he is driving at. Everything has half a dozen meanings."

"I grant you that Swedenborg is not easy" came the familiar admission, "but I will not agree with you that he is abstruse."

"But if the Bible must be read with Swedenborg as a key," Troth argued, "and if you must also have a key for Swedenborg and maybe still another key for that key, then where are we?"

"Then," said Mr. Boyer with a laugh, "we are back to a scientific conclusion. Swedenborg put it like this: 'Whoever is in the spiritual affection of truth apperceives that there are few things which he knows, and an infinite number of things which he does not know. And he also knows that to know and acknowledge this is the first step to wisdom.' "

Pastor Troth got up quietly and went to the library shelves. Mr. Boyer also rose and they stood together without a word, looking at the volumes. After a moment Boyer spoke. "You are welcome to take any you wish, Pastor Troth."

"Yes," said the pastor sorrowfully, "if a man just had the time to read all the things he ought to read!"

"But you have many years ahead of you" came the sincere reply. "And I have many books."

I do not know which book the Reverend Mr. Troth took home with him that day, but I learned that he was a frequent visitor in the Centre after our first meeting.

Once I asked him about it and he said stanchly, "Purely an academic interest. I'm not so narrow-minded that I won't look into other religions. I like to find out what they've got, then put them up against our true doctrine and see what happens."

"What have you been reading?"

"Oh, I've been looking through the *Arcana* and peeping into *Apocalypse Revealed*. They're not the kind of books you sit down and read through in a couple of afternoons." He lapsed into thought. "How does a man write so much in one lifetime?"

I had been reading *The Four Doctrines* which Boyer had left with me and I asked Troth if he had seen it. The six-hundred-page book discussed New Church tenets under the headings "The Lord," "The Scriptures," "Life and Faith."

Troth said, "Yes, I've looked at *The Four Doctrines,* and I'll tell you something. I could read most of that book to my congregation and it might do a lot of good. It's orthodox with one exception. Swedenborg is never content unless he drags in the spiritual and the celestial! He's not satisfied with just getting *men* to understand; *he's* out to persuade the angels, too."

"How do you mean?"

"He says there is in God a Trinity, not of persons but of Essence, and that this Trinity consists of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why doesn't he stop there? My catechism tells me that the true God is a Triune God, three distinct Persons in one divine Being, or *Essence.* My catechism says Essence, too. But Swedenborg won't let it go at that. He claims that this Essence is related to the same combination in man, namely in soul, mind and body. Then he ties this up to virtues. The Essence of love, he says, is in the Father. Wisdom in the Son. Divine action in the Holy Spirit. There, you see, he's back to his idea of natural, spiritual and celestial."

"The science of correspondences?"

"He calls it the Trinity of Essence," complained Troth. "I think this kind of exegesis is what got Swedenborg's father into trouble long ago in Sweden. You know, of course, that his father was a Lutheran bishop and was accused of heterodoxy. He was more interested in speculative theology than dogma. I always figure that the decisions of councils are better than the opinions of individuals, though there are exceptions. Luther was certainly an exception! And as far as the doctrine of the Lord is concerned, I can go along with Swedenborg on that. I like it that he doesn't try to prove the existence of God. He says that God was and God is and God always shall be, and that's that."

"And do you agree with him on his estimate of Jesus?"

"When he looks for an explanation of the attributes of God he finds them in Jesus Christ, and that's the way it ought to be. When he talks about Jesus I have the feeling that his Lutheranism went deeper than he would ever admit. Virgin birth, pre-existence with the Father, resurrection—he goes right down the line. Of course, there's always that symbolism, that mystical speculation, that correspondence idea, which, as far as I'm concerned, is beyond anything a Christian needs."

But when next I saw Mr. Boyer he assured me that Swedenborgian doctrine was exactly what the Christian Church desperately needed.

"The church," he said, "has lost its vitality because it assumes every man can believe what he wishes and reject what he does not understand. Such a practice limits it and tends to make the church more human than divine."

"I'm sure that Pastor Troth would go along with you on that," I said, "but is he ready to say that Swedenborg is the answer?"

"Pastor Troth has not grasped the internal spiritual meaning of our teaching," Boyer said with a sigh. "He will not do what I did. Mr. Troth sees the New Church only in the light of his traditional faith. His sectarianism colors and distorts the teachings. To appreciate the full significance and contribution of Emanuel Swedenborg we must dismiss many of our preconceived ideas and early indoctrinations.

"Though we call our work the New Church, it is not a church in the sense of physical organization. It is a spiritual movement and statistics will give you no idea of its influence. Its membership is in the souls of men. Its object is to draw together the relationship of God and man and by an increase of wisdom to enable man to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error. Its end is to bring men of all faiths into the church universal through a knowledge of the meaning of human existence and true vision of the life to come.

"I have the deepest respect and admiration for Mr. Troth, but I fear he will never be able to struggle upward through the dogma of the past——"

"I suppose," I interrupted, "it is difficult for men of Troth's type to make the decision which you made years ago."

"Swedenborg," Boyer reflected, "drew an interesting analogy when he compared the emergence of the Word to the heat and light of the sun. As the sun causes vegetation to grow even when trees and shrubs hide its direct rays and clouds obscure it, so the

Divine Truth in its sustaining and creative effect nourishes both angels and men even when they do not profess to be directly in the light."

True to Mr. Boyer's prophecy, Troth's interest in the New Church tapered off. He found himself in essential agreement with many of its teachings and admitted that its "speculations" were helpful and provocative, but they also subtly led into new doctrines and forcibly enmeshed him with theories that were completely unorthodox. He could not make the intellectual adjustment necessary for their acceptance nor would his religious honesty permit him to rationalize his way through what he called "the maze of things mystical, allegorical and quasi-historical."

Most disconcerting to Pastor Troth was one special claim which the New Church made for itself. From *Apocalypse Explained* and *Apocalypse Revealed* he learned that Swedenborg believed that the "Last Judgment" had already taken place in the spiritual world. A new heaven had thus been established there, and it was now up to man to establish a new earth. This new earth, described in the final chapters of the Book of Revelation and referred to as the Holy City, was, according to Swedenborgian belief, a symbol of a restored and purified Christian Church, the New Church, the Church of the New Jerusalem.

"Plainly," Troth contended, "and all too plainly for me, the Swedenborgians think of themselves as the true inheritors of a new doctrine. Not only that, they believe that this New Church was prophesied by the Lord Himself. They think it is a counterpart of the church which already exists in the World of Spirits. They say, 'The Church is God's heaven on earth.' My catechism tells me that the holy Christian Church is the 'whole number of believers in Christ,' and that is good enough for me."

I had the feeling that Pastor Troth was now more deeply rooted in his own faith than before his skirmish with the Swedenborgians. But a touch of the "heat and light of the sun" had filtered through. One day he told me jovially that I should have been at his Sunday morning service. "You'd have heard me preach a Swedenborgian sermon!" he boasted.

"But without Swedenborgian doctrine," I remarked.

"Yes, I guess that's right," he acknowledged. "And it worked out in good shape. Luke 16:19. 'There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in crimson and fine linen, and lived in mirth and splendor every day. And there was a certain poor man, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores.' Swedenborg had an interesting speculation on this. He said that the rich man meant the Jewish nation, called rich because it possessed the Word of God. The crimson and fine linen signify the good and truth of the Word. Mirth and splendor are the delight in reading the Word. Lazarus is the Gentile nation without the Word and because it was a despised nation, it lay at the gate full of sores. Quite an idea, don't you think?"

"Our Swedenborgian friends would very likely say that you have worked out the idea of the natural and spiritual correspondences, but how about the celestial?"

"I didn't go that far," said Pastor Troth laughing lightly. "And I don't intend to. But I think if our seminaries were smart they'd teach us some Swedenborgian symbolism. His writings are full of illustrative material and the analogies are fascinating. But as for me, that's as far as I want to go."

I went farther. I attended New Church services in New York and California. I made additional trips to the Swedenborg Philosophical Centre. And one day I went out to Norway, Iowa, to convince myself that there was actually a New Church in rural U.S.A. For Swedenborgianism is a "city faith." Its national membership of some fifteen thousand is nearly ninety per cent urban. The churches which it built during the last decade were all in metropolitan centers. Nonetheless, I discovered a small congregation in the Midwest whose story should have an important place in the colorful annals of religious Americana.

The white frame church with its shuttered cupola stands on a wooded hilltop at a country crossroads four miles south of the village of Norway. Its origin goes back to a cobbler shop in St. Louis where, in 1844, a group of working people met to study the *Arcana Coelestia.* They read into this mystical treatise an injunction to live co-operatively as a mutualistic society. The Swedish philosopher had said, "In man there is not any member who does not derive his good from what is general. In the world every man should receive from the community the necessary, useful and delightful things of life. The community is as a lake from which remunerations and wealth flow in."

In the cobbler's shop these people dreamed of utopia and, lured by the rich farmland of Iowa, they tried to make that dream come true. Soon more than a hundred devotees of the seer of Stockholm were working together in a settlement which they called "Jasper Community." The name was taken from Revelation 21:19: "The first foundation was jasper." Swedenborg had explained that the spiritual meaning of jasper was "the divine truth of the Word." Though their communal experiment proved unsuccessful, the church prospered and descendants of the pioneer founders perpetuated the traditional faith of the first and only rural Swedenborgian congregation in my research.

The heavy, weathered church door creaked on its hinges as I opened it. Through a small vestibule I entered the silent, high-vaulted auditorium where two sections of brown-stained pews faced the slightly recessed sanctuary. Two hundred worshipers could be accommodated in this country chapel, and the rows of tall windows made the interior cheerful and bright. There were no statues or ornamentation, but a "tabernacle" placed against the sanctuary's back wall was an inclusion not found in the traditional Protestant church. It was a deep shadowbox covered with a red, gold-fringed curtain. Inside was a large copy of the Scriptures. Swedenborg had revealed, "The tabernacle is the inmost of that Heaven where the Lord is in the holiness of His Word."

The pulpit was the ordinary mahogany lectern-type located directly in front of the tabernacle of the church chancel. High above it on the chancel arch were printed the words, *"Ich und der Vater sind Eins,"* I and the Father are One. This was the declaration of faith of the pioneers who had built this house of worship seventy-five years ago when their services were conducted in the German language. But the huge volumes of books in the glass-covered cases against the wall were mostly in English. If Swedenborg ever returned in spirit to this friendly meeting house, he would be pleased to find his complete publications carefully preserved and showing signs of much use and study. The *Arcana Coelestia, Heaven and Hell, The Divine Providence, Conjugal Love,* the *Miscellaneous Theological Works* were all in evidence.

I took from the case a copy of the New Church *Book of Wor-*

ship and sat down to look it over. It seemed to me a combination of the German Psalter and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, together with hymns and chants which could be found in the songbooks of liturgical churches anywhere in Christendom. Only one hymn was attributed to Swedenborg:

> In boundless mercy, gracious Lord appear,
> Darkness dispel, the humble mourner cheer;
> Vain thoughts remove, melt down the flinty heart,
> Draw every soul to choose the better part.
>
> Thy presence fills the universal space,
> Thy grace appears to all the human race;
> Oh, visit us with light and life divine,
> Fill every soul, for every soul is thine.
>
> The blessed Jesus is my Lord, my love;
> He is my King, from Him I shall not move.
> Hence earthly charms, far, far from me depart,
> Nor seek to draw from my dear Lord my heart.
>
> That uncreated beauty, which has gained
> My raptured heart, has all my glory stained;
> His loveliness my soul has prepossessed,
> And left no room for any other guest.

Since the music for this hymn seemed simple enough for me to pick out the melody, I went to the piano and was just opening it when I heard the creak of the outside door. In a moment a slightly built, white-haired man appeared at the back of the auditorium. He was dressed in overalls and farmer's work jacket. After peering at me over his spectacles he said cordially, "I saw your car and wondered if I could be of any help."

"Why, yes," I said jokingly, "you can play this hymn for me."

He took me off guard by showing no surprise as he answered, "I guess I can do that all right if it's one of ours."

He came down the aisle slowly with somewhat halting steps, but his expression was wise and alert as he asked who I was, meanwhile scanning the hymn which I had selected.

I introduced myself and he said, "I am Henry Brockshink. Live just across the road."

"Are you the minister?" I asked.

"No," he answered with a quiet smile. "We don't have a local minister. But one comes out from Chicago every now and then."

He was pleased and interested when I told him of my acquaintance with John Boyer.

"You're not a member of the New Church?" he inquired.

"No."

"Know much about it?"

"Not a great deal."

"You ought to learn about it. It would do you good."

"How long have you been a member?"

"All my life and that will soon be eighty years. Mother brought me to the services in the days when we still met in the homes."

"Do you remember when this church was built?"

"I helped build it," he said proudly. "I was pretty young. Just a boy. But I carried some of the brick for the chimney."

"Have you attended many other churches?"

"Lots of them, but I always come back to Swedenborg."

"What do you find in the New Church that you don't find in other denominations?"

His answer came readily as if he had been asked the question many times: "An appeal to reason."

Prompted by my interest, he embarked on an excursion into the *Arcana* which was characteristically Swedenborgian. He took me through the science of correspondences with the same familiarity with which he might have shown me around the premises of his farm. He talked about Swedenborg as if he were a neighbor just down the road. He described himself as the church sexton, but he sounded like Mr. Boyer, and the same verve and eager interest marked his words. "An appeal to reason" was his text.

"Swedenborg," said this unusual rural spokesman, "convinced me that reason is the light of heaven. Most churches like to appeal to man's ego. They say, for example, that man is divine. What do they mean? Swedenborg says that the divine can be in a man but not in what belongs to man. For what belongs to man is nothing but evil. The Divine is separated from what belongs to man and is elevated above it. Man reflects the divine only as he acts from sound reason and regards his relationship to heaven. He is human to the degree in which he acts from perverted reason and thinks only in terms of the world."

I listened amazed. Then he asked if I knew anything about "sense perception" according to the teachings of Swedenborg. Concluding that I did not, he explained, "We are taught that there are many areas of knowledge in us which never inflow through the senses, but which come to us through the inner man. To perceive truth is to perceive goodness. The natural man, no matter how wise, does not enjoy the intelligence of the spiritual man, for the spiritual man perceives by way of an inner perception."

From here Mr. Brockshink went on to a consideration of the theory of "discrete degrees."

"This was one of Swedenborg's universal contributions to a clearer understanding of the world," he told me. "I'm surprised you never studied it! Swedenborg theorized that the material world is the effect, the spiritual world is the cause and God is the end. There are not only cause and effect to be taken into consideration, there is also reason. Men who want to be wise of themselves reason, sensuously and scientifically, about things which they do not understand and they end in doubt. Those who are wise in the knowledge of the inner man reason according to faith, and they end in a knowledge of God."

As I listened to this remarkable old man, the little rural sanctum was transformed into the great Church of the New Jerusalem which, its adherents claim, is a movement of the mind and a way of life.

"But," Mr. Brockshink concluded, "if you are coming here for a service, you will learn about these things from a much better authority than I."

He had not forgotten about the song. "I come here every now and then to play the piano and sometimes I sing a bit," he said. "Here's an old hymn I want you to hear. It is called 'Sacred Pictures,' and was used long ago for teaching Scripture texts."

He sang a verse:

"The eastern slope of Olivet
Has palm trees, green and fair,
And Bethany, the place of dates,
A village small, is there.

"There Lazarus and Martha dwell,
And Mary, mild and sweet,
The better part hath chosen well,
And sits at Jesus' feet."

"At the end of each verse," he explained, "we had to recite the Bible passages upon which the song was based. This one was John 12, verses one and two: 'Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany. There they made him a supper and Martha served, and Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.' Also Luke 10:39, 'And Martha had a sister called Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.' "

I wanted to hear more about this interesting device for teaching Scripture texts, and Mr. Brockshink was easily persuaded to continue.

"Now to the Mount of Calvary
Our mournful footsteps go.
I see the suffering Savior die
Upon the cross of woe.

"No clustering vine nor blossoming tree
Allure my sorrowing eye;
That cross of pain is all I see,
Oh, hill of Calvary."

" 'And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.' Luke 23:33." The old man searched his memory and softly began another verse.

"The shining pages now unfold
One picture more, for me;
I see the wondrous streets of gold,
The jasper walls I see.

"Like crystal, clear, I see a stream,
The tree of life is nigh,
The gates of pearl, how fair they gleam,
Jerusalem on high."

" 'And he showed me that great city, the New Jerusalem. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.' Revelation 21:10 and 23."

In the simple technique of these "Sacred Pictures" I saw again how the New Church related its teachings and experiences to the Bible. The Bible held an inner Word revealed through study and faith. Learning this fact helped me to perceive a cardinal Swedenborgian decree: the soul is the interior man who through the body acts in the world.

I was to learn from Mr. Boyer that Swedenborgians believe that no living thing is devoid of a soul. The soul is life. It is the manifestation of Creative Power and all forms of life are of the family of God. The soul is the recipient of the Love and Wisdom of God. The degree of life in living things is according to its *use,* and because the activity of man's soul is the highest form of use, there is no limit to its progression. Boyer frequently quoted the New Church belief: "The soul clothes itself with a body as a man clothes himself with a garment, for the soul inflows into the human mind and through this into the body, bearing with it the life which it continually receives from the Lord, and thus transfers it into the body, where, by the closest union, it makes the body live."

The soul which animates man is bound to the spirit-soul through a psychical cord. So said Swedenborg and no man has ever surpassed him in his search for the nature of life and its activity. The animating soul and the spirit-soul are one, but thoughts and impulses originate on the spiritual level. Transmitted to the natural sphere, they encounter the problem of adjustment to a physical environment. Natural life differs from spiritual life, and the natural realm from the spiritual realm both in degree and in kind.

There is, actually, only one assignment which God gives to man: harmonize the guidance of the spiritual level with the natural or material order. Obey the interior impulses, for they are the promptings of the spirit. Develop the harmony of correspondences between the spirit life and the earth life and thereby fulfill the highest requirement of Divine Truth. This analysis of New Church dialectics served as a guide to help me through the intricate maze of mystical teachings.

But John Boyer was right. Swedenborg is neither popular nor easy to comprehend. Whether interpreted by trained scholars or by an Iowa farmer, he remains difficult and profound.

I prepared my students as best I could for the Swedenborgian service. In my class of nearly two hundred, only ten had ever heard of the New Church; less than half had ever heard of Emanuel Swedenborg. How would they react to the "Science of Correspondences," "Discrete Degrees," the "Theory of Emanation"? What kind of a sermon would Boyer preach and how would the members of the class react? When he came to my office on the Saturday before the scheduled Sunday meeting, I expressed my apprehension.

"This class of mine," I told him, "is made up of undergraduates. They are between eighteen and twenty-one years old. This is the age at which young people are usually considered spiritually delinquent. Of the ten thousand students on our campus less than twenty per cent attend church services regularly."

"But," Boyer replied, "how many are asking questions about religion?"

"They all have questions," I acknowledged.

"What are they asking?"

"They want to know how to think of God——" I began.

"They have a right to know," Boyer interrupted. "Let them think of God as *One,* not as Three Persons. And let them think of God in terms of Jesus Christ. Then they will know what to believe."

"That isn't enough," I said.

"Man cannot think *of* God," Boyer answered. "Man thinks *from* God. But I know what you mean. Some people need a picture of God as reality. This is as difficult as thinking of love or life in terms of reality. God is the great Itself. He is Love, Life, Power, Will, Order in action. The ancient church believed God to be a Divine Man. Let those who must think of Him in tangible terms do so. But He is Spirit. As we advance in understanding we think of Him as Divine Being, one in both Person and Essence. Modern man is confused because he has always been taught that there are three persons in God. God is not three persons, but three essentials in one Divine Being. He is love, wisdom and truth. Men have always been taught that God is capable of anger and wrath, that He punishes and destroys. We believe that God is all compassion."

"I suppose," I despaired, "that these things can never be made completely comprehensible."

Boyer did not agree. To him it was entirely clear that "God fills space apart from space. The universe, which is an image of God and hence full of God, could be created only in God from God, for God is Essence itself."

Apprehensively I anticipated my students' reactions to this sort of philosophical tangle. Hesitantly I queried Mr. Boyer about other doctrinal concepts and asked him how he would explain the historical Jesus to a college group.

"He is the sole and only God," he reiterated. "This is verified when He said, 'All Power is given unto Me in Heaven and on earth.' The reason that the Lord cannot act in the same way with every man is that evil and falsities stand in the way and hinder and reject His Divine influx."

"How can we accept the idea that Jesus is the sole and only God?" I asked.

"Through faith. Faith first of the memory, then of the understanding and finally of the heart. Through faith we are led into the Word of God and its inner meaning. Through understanding into its love and life. And when love is gained, we are persuaded that it is true."

"And what about our relationship to Jesus?" I inquired.

"We should emulate Him in our acts, reflect Him in our thoughts, and manifest Him in our lives. The old churches teach that man has a spirit. The New Church assures us that man *is* a spirit and lives with the Lord now in human form. We are completely spiritual *now*. Angels and devils are not a special category or creation. Angels are regenerated human beings whose regeneration has already begun in this life. Devils are degenerate beings whose downward path has also already begun. Delight in heaven consists in turning to God and being useful. Delight in hell means turning from God and being useless."

"What would you tell a student if he asked you how he should pray?"

"Swedenborg says," Boyer answered promptly, "'Prayer is talking with God.' And that is how I would describe it. How does a person talk with God? By opening the mind and the inner man to receive God's revelations. Haven't you ever had inner promptings of the Spirit, times when thoughts and motives and messages came to you from outside yourself? Wherever these are virtuous and constructive they represent internal speech with the Divine. Answer that internal speech and you will be answered in turn. The way to learn to pray is to pray. When we open our hearts in prayer, the Lord enters and reveals Himself to us."

"And what about heaven and hell?" I asked.

"There are as many heavens as there are degrees of Godliness and as many hells as there are evil phantasies."

Although I marveled at the dexterity with which Boyer could attack any question and conquer it in the arena of his faith, I was nonetheless genuinely concerned. Every answer seemed to leave me with one disturbing conclusion: only a Swedenborgian can understand Swedenborg.

I assigned my students readings on Emanuel Swedenborg and referred them to such books as Signe Toksvig's *Emanuel Swedenborg, Scientist and Mystic;* the all-important *An Outline of New-Church Teaching* by William F. Wunsch; *Emanuel Swedenborg, Theologian* by Hiram Vrooman; *The Kingdom of Heaven* by J. H. Spalding and *Swedenborg's Life and Teaching* by George Trobridge. I urged them to read Helen Keller's *My Religion* and referred them to *The Four Doctrines.*

On the appointed Sunday morning I met the nine carloads of students and arranged our caravan.

"This is a field trip," I said in my final instructions, "and it will be a rich experience. There is no better way to understand another man's faith than to put oneself in his place. This is not always easy. When we go to the New Church remember that Swedenborgians believe that the world today and religion today need the gospel of a new revelation. They believe that this revelation was given to men by Emanuel Swedenborg. They say that the Lord appeared to him and commissioned him to write a series of inspired books which are keys to the Scripture and which form the basis of the Church of the New Jerusalem. In fact the New Jerusalem denotes a new divine doctrine. The New Church is interpreted as a spiritual congregation composed of people who represent a heavenly city in a natural world."

"What do they believe?" shouted a student. "I read some of the books, but I still don't know."

I asked the young senior to ride in the car with me. He crowded into the front seat, assuring me that he had read a booklet *Why Swedenborg?* and it had been too deep for him. "Why can't churches go right down the line, one, two, three," he argued, "and say what they believe in language that anybody can understand?"

"That's no good," said another student, in the back seat. "If there's anything to religion, it has a right to be as complicated as chemistry or any of the other sciences."

"Jesus didn't make it that complicated," the senior retorted, and he stopped the argument with this pronouncement. "But what about Swedenborg?" he said to me.

"I suppose the New Church, along with every other denomination, believes it has some special revelation about the teachings of Jesus," I submitted.

"Okay," said the student. "What has it got that Protestantism doesn't have?"

"It believes that men are influenced by spirits and angels and that in this respect there can be no division among denominations and no special sects. Everyone is already in the spiritual world."

"I don't exactly understand it," said the student.

"We give ourselves over to these spirits by our own volition," I tried to explain, "and we become the kind of people we want to be by choice. The quality of one's life depends on this bent toward good or evil. We write our own passport to heaven or hell. After death we go where the nature of our present thoughts leads us. And, says the New Church, the way to prepare ourselves for eternal life and happiness is to worship God, to learn the truth of the Scriptures and to live according to our highest ideal. Maybe, as you say, Jesus expressed all of this in simple terms, but I suppose we need special references and special revelations to make us believe it."

This stimulated a lively discussion among the students in the car. Again I wondered what their reaction to the service would be. They would be led into metaphysics. Perhaps they would be told that Jesus after His crucifixion appeared to people "not by taking on a material body, but by opening the vision to see Him in a spiritual sense." They might learn that when He disappeared by His ascension, He did so by "closing the inner vision."

They would be asked to believe that as the body is sustained by the soul, so the natural world is sustained by the spiritual world, and so the spiritual world is sustained by the Lord. It was possible that they would hear that the second coming of the Lord was looked on as an event that had already occurred and that Swedenborg interpreted it as an advent "not in Person, but in the Word." And as we neared the little rural church, I wondered whether any of the students would ever agree with Swedenborgians in their claim that the New Church is the final church, the true church, the church which "will never pass away or be superseded."

Fortunately the lovely Sabbath morning argued well for God's protective favor on the crowd that had assembled. Farmers, townspeople, teachers from neighborhood schools, several ministers of other denominations, a visiting Swedenborgian from St. Louis who was introduced to me as George H. Quermann, a retired field engineer for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, and even a young man from the Bahamas who worked on a near-by farm were in attendance. A truck with a public-address system was drawn up near a church window. Cars covered the slopes of the country roads.

The Reverend John L. Boyer and Mr. Brockshink were waiting to greet us and escorted us in. We took our places in the crowded auditorium. Here we were: representatives of Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Congregational-Christian, Nazarene, United Brethren and Jewish faiths, joining in songs and a Litany which had the dignity of a Catholic Mass.

Often during the opening of the service a vision of the greatness of American faith came over me. Would that Swedenborg could have seen this symbol of ecumenical worship! Wisely Mr. Boyer made reference to the spirit of unity in his prayer. "O Lord, our heavenly Father, who hast constituted Thy church in heaven and on earth, one fold under one Shepherd, grant that all who know and love Thee may be united in one holy bond of charity and faith. . . ." Nonsectarian hymns also brought us together into oneness of mind.

As I sat in this rural congregation, I remembered another meeting in a New Church, the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D. C. That "cathedral" with its library and parish house represented the National Church of the General Convention of the New Church in the United States. There I had met a venerable New Churchman, the Reverend Paul Sperry. Visiting with him in the lovely English-Gothic House of God, I had felt the same impression that came over me now in this country church. Swedenborg was right: life had more depth than the physical senses could define, the mind had reached into the infinite, the soul had its moorings in some spirit realm.

I should have told my students how Mr. Sperry became a Swedenborgian. As a boy he had moved with his parents to an Eastern city and one day he heard his mother inquire of a neighbor, "Where is the nearest church?"

"About two blocks from here" was the answer.

"What kind of church is it?"

"Swedenborgian."

"What's that? What do they believe?"

"All I know," the neighbor had answered, "is that they teach that if you don't get the right husband in this life, you'll get him in the life to come!"

But Mr. Sperry found something quite different. He became convinced that the great commission of Emanuel Swedenborg was to make God known to modern man and show his relation to God's plan. The more he learned of this teaching, the more he found there was to learn. As the inner meaning of the Word was revealed, so the inner meaning of his life unfolded. City church or rural chapel, Swedenborgians always thought in cosmic terms and never let their lives be small. Like their founder, who claimed citizenship in two worlds, they would not forget their divine heritage. There was one way to lift men above themselves. It could be done only by opening men's eyes to the light of an inner spiritual vision. "Man," said the Seer, "is conjoined to eternity because he lives by love and faith."

Now Mr. Boyer stood in the pulpit with the open Bible before him. He read his text: Exodus 28:31-34. "Thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue and upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates and bells of gold between them. A golden bell and a pomegranate upon the hem of the robe round about."

Secretly I wondered whether these Old Testament words could hold the attention of my students for thirty or forty minutes. I glanced around to find everyone listening respectfully.

"The long robe worn by the priest," the speaker said, "was designed to be an outward, visible emblem of his religion. It had nothing to do with the priest himself as a man. It was a token of the faith he professed. We do not become religious by changing our outward appearances. We do not clothe ourselves in righteousness with outer garments. But for a moment picture the priest's robe. See the intricate embroidery done by the loving hands of oriental worshipers. But look particularly at the golden bells and the pomegranates enhancing the beauty of the garment. There is a message for us here and a lesson."

Many of my students had brought notebooks and they opened them quietly as Boyer continued. "The golden bells suggest the pleasing aspect of devotion. As far back as we can trace their use, bells have always been associated with man's religion. In the days of ancient superstition it was believed that the very sound of bells kept away evil spirits. Bells are always recognized as the call of God and the invitation of His word. We can read this in the sound of the mosque bell ringing over the quiet of the desert, in the melody of temple bells, in the peal of bells that emanate from churches of all faiths wherever man comes to worship.

"But the bells on the priest's robe are golden and therefore they represent good will, purity, love. Gold, says Swedenborg, is the good which is from the Divine. It is spiritual truth. Why does he say this? How does he know? It was revealed to him out of the spirit world. And it was told him that good is not good unless it has within it an internal good. Worship as an outward act may be sincere enough, but if it has no good will and true intention back of it, it is deficient. What is the outward form of worship that you are wearing? How does it relate to the inner consciousness of your life?"

His unquestioned sincerity was captivating. His practical applications were of the kind that the students appreciated.

"Get yourself in a state of love and charity of soul," he declared. "Then your worship has the quality of that bell of gold. If prayer is offered only in unthinking rote, it is only a hollow sound. As the golden bell hung on the priest's robe, it reminded him that worship should be an inner honesty, an inward devotion and an internal quality of oneness with the Lord."

Then the Reverend Mr. Boyer defined the spiritual significance of the pomegranate. He spoke of its history and its importance in Oriental worship.

"This fruit is really tightly packed with many little fruits. These are shelled out and regarded as one of the most beneficial and nourishing of all God's gifts. Because of its peculiar form and quality, when used as a religious symbol, the pomegranate may be said to typify the countless things of good which are always stored up in the minds of those who try to live well. Swedenborg went further in his interpretation of the inner meaning of the word. He said that the pomegranate, in general, is the cognitive and perceptive and, in particular, the knowledge and perception of good and truth."

This was his demonstration of the science of correspondences. The pomegranate as a fruit was the human interpretation. As the representation of self-sacrifice and self-discipline it had its spiritual significance. In a celestial sense it referred to good and truth.

"Let us think of the pomegranate as symbolizing religion in action. Open it and disseminate the seeds of service! Perform the courtesies, kindnesses and help called for by the Christian faith. 'Ye shall know men by their fruits,' said the Lord, and never did the practical side of religious experience more fittingly express itself than in the symbol of the fruit worn on the robe of the priest, that fruit which is a hundred fruits in one. If we say we are godly people and delight in worship, that is all very commendable. What about our deeds? The recluse who in order to apply himself to prayer and devotion shuts himself off from the world and his fellowmen may be wearing the golden bell, but where is the pomegranate?"

Then he made his practical application. "We need," he maintained, "both worship and work. It is not piety alone which makes men good; it is action and deeds. Christians stand in the presence of a world that calls for inner loyalty and its demonstration through social service. We talk about the harmonious and pleasant sphere of true religion, and there are surely no people more lovable than the genuinely religious-hearted. We talk about philanthropy and good works, and there are no qualities more commendable. In the deepest spiritual experience love of devotion and love of service adorn the garment of life.

"What Aaron the priest demonstrated literally, we are asked to do spiritually. As he walked into the temple of God, the golden bells touched the pomegranates and brought forth their sweet sound. As we walk along the ever-changing road of human experience, we are to exhibit the quietly devotional spirit and also acts of kindliness and charity to men. The spiritual robe which we wear must be hemmed both with bells and pomegranates. Swedenborg has well said, 'All religion is related to life and the life of religion is to do good.' "

We sang a closing hymn and a minister from a near-by Protestant church pronounced the benediction. I went out with the worshipers into the churchyard where the customary introductions and greetings were carried on in little groups while the women of the congregation prepared a basket lunch as a special courtesy to the students. I looked around for the members of my class and found only one or two outside. Going back into the church building, I discovered the rest of them clustered around Mr. Boyer. They were asking questions and he, together with Mr. Brockshink and Mr. Quermann, were enthusiastically explaining intricate New Church teachings. Boxes of books had appeared from somewhere, and free literature was being distributed.

I listened in on a remarkable aftermeeting. I heard questions which, it seemed to me, students everywhere across our nation were asking: "What is God? What is sin? What about the life to come? What is meant by redemption, salvation, conversion?" But over and over again one question repeated itself. It was asked sincerely of Boyer the minister, of Brockshink the farmer, of Quermann the engineer. "Does Swedenborg answer all of your religious needs? What will his teachings do for me?" This was their quest, their concern, the voice of a new generation realistically seeking light and honest guidance.

I would probably never know whether any of my students decided to investigate further the teachings of the New Church. Would they ever open the pages of the *Arcana* or look into the great seer's other writings? What would happen to the literature which they accepted gratefully as gifts from the New Church Board of Publications?

Boyer put me at ease. "Our work," he said, "is not to be compared with emotionalized revivals or membership campaigns. We are not appointed to build congregations and churches or make a drive for converts or recruits. The New Church is a movement and not a sect. Swedenborg once had a vision. He saw men of all faiths and creeds united in worship and service like 'gems in a king's crown.' I think that if Emanuel Swedenborg had been with us today—and who knows but that he was—he would have seen a symbol in this country church of what he foresaw for all the world. People of many faiths were here together in union and accord. For a little while they felt their likenesses. For a brief hour they were more spiritual than sectarian. They will go back to their homes, to their churches, to their communities.

"The students will someday go out into the world, into America where better than anywhere on earth the ideal of spiritual unity can be realized. They will take with them the inspiration of this day and it will be a leaven that will grow and touch the lives of others. I wish with all my heart that visitors from oppressed countries could have been with us. I wish they might know what freedom we enjoy and what great horizons we envision. Most of all I wish that American churches would catch Swedenborg's immortal hope of a united Christianity."

Later as we stood together at the door of the church and watched the cars departing along the country roads that led in all directions, Boyer observed, "There you can see what I mean. Next Sunday all of these people, even our own Swedenborgians, will be worshiping in other churches. There will not be another service here for a month or more. But the work goes on and it always will."

I was sure it would, and though I had never fully comprehended Emanuel Swedenborg, I felt that no better statement of his cause had been presented than that which Boyer gave me when he said, "The New Church expresses the inner meaning of religion as it ought to be lived and reveals the knowledge of God as He ought to be known."

Then he added with a smile, "Why don't you find out all about this for yourself?"

CHAPTER VII

THE MORMON

Ted Logan's interest in the Mormon faith was spiritual; mine, geographic. He was following a religious trail; I, road maps.

Our Protestant backgrounds were much alike. We had been indoctrinated with the same catechism, studied the same church histories and subscribed to the same creeds. As we grew older we both felt that there should be more to religion than we had found in books, and I think we were both looking for whatever it is that helps men give a better account of themselves right here and now. Our quests had followed similar lines until the day Ted found his answer in the Mormon faith. Then he said, "Someday when you, too, find the truth, those lines will converge."

About the time he joined the Mormon Church I was sightseeing, standing on a lonely wind-swept hill in the Green Mountains near Sharon, Vermont. The Mormons had sanctified this verdant spot with landscaping and an obelisk that looked like the Washington Monument in miniature. I was told that it weighed a hundred tons and that it was thirty-eight and a half feet high, a foot for every year of the life of the man to whom it was dedicated. On the dark gray granite shaft was the inscription: "Sacred to the memory of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, born here 23rd December, 1805, martyred at Carthage, Illinois, 27th June, 1844."

Near by stood "Memorial Cottage," a modest white frame house honoring the boyhood years of the Prophet's life. I went in and found in the visitors' register a cross section of what America thinks about Mormonism. There before me were the comments in various languages, in many styles of handwriting:

> Deep respect for the Mormon faith.
> I found God through Joseph Smith.
> Baptized here today. Wonderful faith!
> Joseph Smith, a man who has deluded millions.
> Who can believe all this?
> Judge not for ye know not.
> I helped draw this monument up here with my team.
> Joseph Smith, a false prophet.
> Joseph Smith, a true prophet.
> The Spirit of the Prophet is upon me.

I went to the farm near Palmyra, New York, where the boy Joseph came with his parents. Here at the age of fourteen he saw a vision and heard a voice. To my convert friend this was Joseph's first revelation; to me it was a legend. I walked the short quarter-mile of farm lane to the remnant of an old rail fence where a sign read: "Sacred Grove . . . Silence please." I pushed open the rustic iron gate.

Enchanted elms and maples which sheltered the place from the world let in the soft glow of late afternoon and wove patterns on the grass-covered ground. Above me transparent clouds lined with the mystic blue of the sky might have been spirit forms brushing against the topmost leaves. Mormons believed that

Joseph Smith saw much more than this. He came here one day confused by the multiplicity of Christian sects which during the days of his youth were beating revival drums in opposing camps. He knelt down in this grove. Here where I was standing he prayed aloud and asked God to show him the true faith. His answer was a shaft of light breaking through the trees and stretching into heaven like a marble tower. Dazed, he looked at it and saw within it two personages. He heard a voice: "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" He was almost overcome as the voice continued, telling him to join none of the existing faiths. "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They teach false doctrines and the commandments of men. They have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. Soon the fullness of the gospel will be revealed to you."

This, then, was hallowed ground. This was the site of the first great Mormon miracle. But I saw only drifting clouds. The voices I heard were chirping birds. Silently the mystery of religion held me in thought; not only Mormon religion; every religion with its claims of miracles and voices and visions.

There was the sound of someone approaching. Into the clearing came an elderly man who nodded a greeting and made his way slowly to a weathered bench at the edge of the grove. He sat down, carefully putting his hat beside him. Soon he leaned back and closed his eyes.

I moved about in the grove interesting myself in some of the initials which thoughtless worldlings had carved into the trees. After a moment the stranger spoke. "Your first visit here?" he asked.

"Yes. And yours?"

"I come here often," he said. "It is very peaceful."

"Are you a Mormon?"

"I am."

"Have you always been one?"

"No."

"Didn't you find it hard to believe some of these Mormon miracles, such as the one that is supposed to have happened here?"

"Very hard," he confessed.

"I should think so," I said.

"Very hard," he repeated as if recalling obstacles which had seemed insurmountable in the path of his quest. "But then I remembered that what took place here is not so unusual in religion."

"What do you mean?"

"A voice came to Samuel," he reflected. "Angels stood at the tent of Abraham. Shepherds heard a song in the night and saw a heavenly host. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. These and many other happenings are like the Prophet's experiences. The day of revelation is not past. Religion is a matter of belief. There is always something that we must accept on faith."

The wind stirred through the trees. The clouds went on their mysterious unobstructed way. Perhaps the old man was right. But there was something about miracles in the State of New York that seemed a good deal less genuine than miracles in Bible lands. Why that should be, I did not know. I suppose I had been thoroughly indoctrinated with such things as the "song in the night" and with the heavenly visitations recorded in Holy Writ. The element of time also played its part. It was much easier to accept the accounts of a few thousand years ago than to believe those that had happened during the past century. After all, the boy Joseph was not the boy Samuel, though for a moment I wondered why he should not have had a right to hear voices if heaven wanted it so. "The day of revelation is not past" was a basic Mormon concept, and I could not say that I did not agree. But there was no converging of the lines of Ted Logan's quest and mine when I left the Sacred Grove. He, like the stranger, had the will to believe; I, the urge to investigate.

Not far from the entrance to the lane, just across a country road, stood the Smith farmhouse. This was also historically important, and the guide led me reverently up the spindled stairway to Joseph's bedroom.

"Is this where he had his other vision?" I asked.

"The Angel Moroni appeared to Joseph several times" came the answer. "But the house where the first visitations occurred was a log cabin which stood on the other side of the road. Unfortunately that has been torn down."

"How old was Joseph when Moroni first appeared to him?"

"He was eighteen."

"And he was told where the book of gold was hidden?"

"Yes, the book and the Urim and Thummim. Those are the crystals which were to help in the translation. Some call them magic spectacles. There was also a breastplate into which these fit, and it must have resembled the breastplate of the ancient high priests."

"So Joseph went out and dug up the treasure?"

"No," corrected the guide. "The Angel Moroni appeared to him three times during that first period of visitation. He took Joseph to the Hill Cumorah and showed him the hiding place. He showed him the book and the breastplate. But there was a long period of testing before Joseph was allowed to receive them. He had to wait four years."

"Did his parents know about all of this?"

"They did."

"What did they say?"

"They knew it was of the Lord, but they kept the secret to themselves as much as they could. They knew that Joseph had been set aside for a special mission."

"No one else knew about it?"

"Joseph married Emma Hale during this time and she, of course, knew the story. It is said that she waited at the bottom of the Hill Cumorah on the day that the book was delivered to Joseph. She waited in the wagon knowing that the miracle was being enacted. You must visit the Hill Cumorah. It is very beautiful, but I think perhaps it was even more beautiful when Joseph stood there with the angel."

A short time later I, too, saw Moroni brilliant and compelling against the distant sky. Standing with his right hand pointed to the heavens, he ruled the countryside from the highest point on Cumorah Hill. He did not come to me. I climbed the long stretch of grassy slope and went to him. To Joseph he was substance and spirit. To me he was only a sculptured figure atop a towering shaft. Yet from his exalted station he seemed to be saying, "Here on this spot plates of gold were actually buried for fourteen hundred years. Here I revealed these plates to Joseph Smith. Here I said to him, 'God has work for you to do and your name shall be held for good and evil among all nations.' "

It was only the echo of my thoughts. Fragments of Mormon history were crystallizing in my mind in this locale where the Mormon story was born. Here at the end of the fourth year of his time of testing when Joseph was twenty-one, he was ordered by Moroni to grub away the earth from the surface of a stone. Then he fixed a lever under it and pried it up. Before him lay the religious treasure. The plates of gold were about seven inches wide and eight inches long, paper-thin and fastened together by three rings near the edge. In thickness the book measured about six inches. Part of it was sealed, which meant that it contained prophecy for a still later revelation. Near the plates lay the breastplate together with the crystal spectacles. Joseph touched these things and handled them.

Moroni gave him strength to carry them, hidden beneath his coat, down to where his wife was waiting. Excitedly they drove home, and Joseph told the story first to his father and mother and then to his two brothers and his sister. Carefully he concealed the precious apports, thereby keeping Moroni's command to show them to no one for the time being. The members of the family kept his sayings in their hearts. Soon the work of translation would begin. Soon Joseph would be directed how this was to be done. "Truly," said the father, "this thing is of the Lord."

To me it was a story; to Ted Logan, a miracle.

Skeptics there must have been among those who made the pilgrimage to Mormon hill the day I stood near the Moroni monument. Some looked at the sculptured panels at the base of the shaft and turned away smiling wisely. One man remarked, "Doggonedest story I ever heard." Another: "Well, who's to say?" And still a third: "You should see this at night when the lights are on. You'd swear the angel was real." Silently Moroni stood with his right hand raised to heaven and his left hand over the book of gold, and no one looked up at him without going away in a more thoughtful mood than he had come.

A young couple in their early twenties lingered beside the monument until everyone else had gone. I said to them, "What do you think?"

"It's wonderful!" exclaimed the girl.

"What do you think about the miracle?" I asked.

"That's what it was," proclaimed the boy. "A miracle."

"What makes you so sure?"

"If it isn't true," said the boy confidently, "where did the Book of Mormon come from?"

"It could have been made up," I told him.

"By whom?"

"By anyone. By Joseph Smith himself."

"That would have been even more of a miracle. He had no education."

"There's the story of the Spaulding manuscript," I suggested. "It's said that a Presbyterian minister by the name of Solomon Spaulding wrote a story very much like the Book of Mormon. The manuscript fell into the hands of a Baptist named Sidney Rigdon who, in turn, was accused of giving it to Joseph Smith. Now that *might* be where the Book of Mormon came from."

Instantly the young man spoke up. "That story has been conclusively refuted by the church."

"You are—a member?" I asked.

"We both are."

"Oh, I see. Well, I—well, anyway, that's the Spaulding story. By the way, have you been on a mission?"

"No, I haven't," he replied. "But I may go on one. Perhaps soon."

"For two years?" I asked.

"That's usually the time."

"Well, I didn't mean to accuse your leader of plagiarism," I apologized.

"That's all right," acknowledged the boy amiably. "People have many mistaken ideas about our church and our leaders. That's why I feel I ought to go on a mission."

"Well, good luck!" I said, feeling again that in the realm of faith he who lives the life of it, however little, has a stronger argument than he who has only the knowledge of it, however much.

Some days later I followed the trail of Joseph Smith to a farm south of Fayette, New York. Religious adventure was the spoor that led me over paths where Ted Logan had never been, but I knew from letters that he was accompanying me vicariously from behind the grocery-store counter in the Midwestern town where he was employed. He told me that he was now taking an active part in the work of the small group which constituted the Mormon Church of his home town. The opposition of some of his friends only strengthened his loyalty. "Persecution and the Mormon faith have always gone hand in hand," he wrote. As for me and my wanderlusting, he had this to say, "The miracles of Mormonism are intended to be a challenge to a man's life, not a test of his credulity."

He must have known I would need such an injunction when I drove into the isolated yard of the Whitmer farm. Here the Mormon Church was founded on April 6, 1830, in circumstances as dramatic as a movie thriller. I had read the details, I had talked about them with Ted; now I was to hear the story on location. My narrators, the young caretaker and his wife, were zealots of a truly apostolic order, disciples through whom the past was brought convincingly to seekers like me. They were defenders of the faith, volunteers in the legion of the Prophet of Palmyra, and they had the intense confidence that the cause of the church was not only right but also divine.

"Here the Prophet sat," I was told as we entered a small room in the sturdily built log cabin. "Here is where the last of the plates was translated. Joseph Smith sat here behind a curtain. He wore the breastplate and looked through crystal spectacles to interpret the characters. The language was reformed Egyptian. As he read the translation aloud, Oliver Cowdery sat here outside the curtain and wrote it all down."

I was shown through the cabin while the young man and his wife recounted the saga of this native faith. Behind us came their two children, already catching the fervor of their parents' love for the Seer of Cumorah.

The young wife said, "The first three witnesses to the plates of gold were Oliver Cowdery the schoolmaster, and two farmers, Martin Harris and David Whitmer."

The husband added, "Once a visitor asked me, 'Why should we believe common everyday men like that? How do we know they were honest?' I said, 'The disciples of Jesus were common everyday men, too, and we believe them.' "

"Well," I commented, "it's the amazing story about the plates of gold that causes people to be skeptical."

"I know," came the reply. "It was that way from the beginning. Martin Harris even went to New York City to see a noted scholar, Professor Charles Anthon of Columbia College. Mr. Harris took with him transcriptions of actual writings on the plates; also parts of the translation. Professor Anthon said that the work was remarkable and that the translations were entirely correct. He gave Mr. Harris a certificate to that effect. Then he asked, 'By the way, Mr. Harris, where did the plates come from?' 'From an angel of God,' said Mr. Harris. The professor said, 'Let me see that certificate I gave you once more.' Martin Harris handed it to him and Professor Anthon tore it into shreds."

"But where are the plates now?" I asked. "Is it possible for anyone to see them?"

"Hardly," said the wife.

"No," added the husband seriously, "it is not possible to see them because the Prophet returned them to the angel."

"I see."

"I know what you mean" was the earnest response. "Whenever I tell people that, they look at me as if to say, 'Quite a story!' It is quite a story, but it is true. I say to them, 'You believe in the Bible, don't you?' 'Oh, yes,' they admit, 'we believe in the Bible.' So do I. So do you, I am sure. But have you ever seen *those* original manuscripts?"

"No," I admitted. "I suppose I trust to the scholarship and the integrity of the men who helped us get our translations."

"Exactly," he concluded. "And furthermore the Bible stands on its influence and power over the lives of men. That is the real test."

"I guess I would agree with that."

"And so it is with the Book of Mormon. It stands on its influence, too, and the influence is growing all the time. The Book of Mormon doesn't displace the Bible; it complements it. While the Old Testament is a history of the Jewish people, the Book of Mormon is the history of ancient American civilization as well as prophecy and fulfillment. The New Testament is the story of Jesus and the plan of redemption, and the Book of Mormon is its confirmation. It also tells us that Jesus appeared on this Western continent after His resurrection."

"You mean," I interrupted, "Mormons actually believe that Jesus was here in America?"

"Why, yes," he replied. "We have the record."

"Why not?" his wife chimed in. "Why should He have been limited to any one continent or country?"

I was almost ready to share her enthusiasm.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone in America believed that He had really been here? I think it would change everyone's life," she went on, highly confident.

"It would change everyone's life just to read and study the Book of Mormon," her husband added.

"Of course it would," she agreed.

"For then," he said, "the hidden things in Scripture would be revealed to everyone. Then people would see that the restoration of the church was foreordained."

"You believe that the Mormon Church was foreordained?" I asked, and the unpretentious surroundings spoke a thousand contradictions.

"Surely!" was my guide's emphatic answer. "It is the one church in which God still speaks and reveals Himself to men. It is the one church patterned after the original church of the time of Christ. You'll believe this someday," he predicted confidently, "because I think you are looking for truth. More and more people are believing it all the time. There are almost a million Mormons, you know."

If those were the figures, they also constituted something of a miracle, for they represented more members than we had in our denomination, the Evangelical and Reformed, and we went back to 1517! Where did all these Ted Logans come from? What was the secret of the growth of Mormonism? Why were the followers of this faith so enthusiastic and so unquestionably committed to their beliefs?

I left the Whitmer farm chiding myself for my naïveté, for the last remark I made to the couple was "If Christianity was born in an upper room, I don't see why Mormonism couldn't have been born in a log cabin." The guide should have said that, not I. Or perhaps it should not have been said at all. I was angry with myself for ceasing to be objective. I felt that a web of credulity was being woven around me both by the advocates of this strange gospel and by my own romanticizing. I even discovered that I had bought a copy of the Book of Mormon.

That night I opened it. Printed on the flyleaf was the sworn testimony of the three witnesses, Cowdery, Whitmer and Harris. Beneath it was the testimony of eight additional men who affirmed that they, too, had "seen and hefted and knew of a surety" that the plates of gold were real.

So I paged through this American Bible wondering how many Protestants had ever seen a copy or read a verse out of any of the fifteen books. Wherever these auxiliary scriptures came from, whatever they were, they surpassed in magnitude and content my most extravagant expectations. The style was Biblical, the references to Holy Writ were voluminous, the ancient story was tremendously involved. It was not the kind of book a man would read for pastime or write for profit. It was solemn and ponderous and heavy as the plates on which it was inscribed. No Vermont schoolboy wrote this, and no Presbyterian preacher tinkered with these pages.

After wading through the First Book of Nephi, I was ready to settle for the miracle of Cumorah and let it go at that. It would surely be convenient to say, "The plates for this religious tome were hidden by an angel, discovered by a young man whom the Lord had chosen and translated by means of magic spectacles." That, of course, was exactly what the Book of Mormon itself implied. Mormon, one of God's elect, was the father of Moroni, and together they were the engravers and concealers of the ancient manuscript. As for the rest of the Mormon gospel, the battles of the Nephites and the Lamanites and the irreducible genealogies—all this could wait until I sat down with my convert friend, Ted Logan. To him the book was a divine document; to me, an enigma.

But it was no more enigmatical than the church which rose out of its pages. The six charter members who organized the new denomination in the Whitmer cabin grew to sixty, then to six hundred within a matter of months. Converts carried the gospel of the "latter days" throughout New England and Pennsylvania. In Kirtland, Ohio, they built their first temple.

One summer morning I stood in the well-kept temple yard and when I saw the massive, strong-beamed structure, I knew that the builders had in mind time and eternity. This was the Prophet's answer to his enemies. Here he set a defiant landmark against the traditional religions and the society of his day. The churches said he was heretical; the people said he was mad. They put a label on him, "Fraud and Fake and Anti-Christ!" He said, "We will build more temples." They organized against him and he retorted, "We will build a perfect city for the Lord!"

A trek was started westward to Missouri. Joseph claimed it had been revealed to him that somewhere in the heart of the nation God would direct them to a promised land. The converts grew to a thousand, two thousand, three. They came from the Eastern states, from Canada and from Great Britain where volunteer missionaries had gone with the story of the Book of Gold. They were proselytized from American farms and villages with the prophecy that the fullness of the gospel was being restored. That gospel spread with incredible speed all the way to the Missouri River. Mormon camps grew into towns in Clay, Davies and Jackson counties in Missouri.

The tall, bold, broad-shouldered Prophet led the pioneer believers. Men said that his clear blue eyes still saw visions and that his heart communed with the Son of God. They called him a modern Moses and a Joshua. His rallying cry ran through the diverse Christian sects: "The day of revelation is not past!" His influence swept across the frontiers and outran the gospel of the circuit riders. When people followed him, they left their farms and families and surrendered all their worldly goods to help his cause. Homes were divided. Villages were thrown into confusion. The tempo of life was disrupted. It was a revival of consecration and power without the usual "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord." There was no rolling in the dirt on camp-meeting grounds, no altar call, no fanatical exhibition, no talk of hell and lakes of fire.

The "Saints" became a peculiar people, the chosen ones, and they made a clear-cut distinction between themselves and the "Gentile" world. They were Israel restored. They were Joseph's people. Their challenge was "If a man is a Mormon, let him live the Mormon life." And what was that? Something strange and revolutionary. For the first time in the history of American religions, spiritual commitment penetrated the entire life of man, suggesting what he should eat, what he should drink and what he should expect in this life and in the life to come.

"This is not Protestantism!" said the preachers.

"This is not Catholicism!" said the priests.

The followers of the Prophet agreed. To them it was the gospel of restoration. Theirs was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints preparing the nation for the Lord's return. It was too exalted a title for the masses; Mormonism was the nickname that stuck.

The names of many Missouri towns founded by the early Saints also stuck: Smithville, Paradise, Far West, Bethany, Mt. Moriah. Traveling through them, I met modern Mormons who were always willing to talk about their ancestors. There were a few Jack-Mormons, sympathizers with Mormon ideals. There were non-Mormons who knew and cared nothing about the romance of the past. And then there was the heavy man.

I met him at sundown on the veranda of the Plattsburg Hotel. He was tilted back insecurely in a none-too-sturdy chair, resting his feet on the sturdy railing. When I came along on a sultry summer evening, he said genially, "Sit down, son, and get a breeze." I took a chair next to him. His more than two hundred and fifty pounds would have shut off any breeze, had there been one. He was grossly fat with huge ears, a pocked and bulbous nose, and a face fire-red from sun and wind. His breathing was timed by the rise and fall of his stomach tugging at the buttons of his blue shirt. While audibly sucking the inhalations through his open lips, he fanned himself with his newspaper. I paged through a folder of Mormon notes. He talked about the weather and the heat of the day but worked around to me until he knew my business.

"Mormons!" he exclaimed with a grunt of reminiscence. "Two of those fellows stopped at my place down in Joplin once."

"Did you let them in?"

"I did not!" Then he turned to me with a jovial inquiry in his watery eyes. "D'ya think I should have?" He answered for himself in a speech-making voice, "I should not! I got a religion. I'm a Methodist. You got a religion, haven't you?"

"Sure."

"Okay," he said; then he loosened his collar and tie.

Fearing that we might get off a favorite subject, I countered, "It's because I do have a religion that I like to find out about others."

"I don't get it," he said.

"Like a man who has a car that he likes," I explained. "That makes him interested in other cars. Or maybe it's roads I'm interested in."

"Yes, but Mormonism," he demurred; "that's a good road to stay off of."

"Why?"

"Why?" he grunted. " 'Cause they're bigamists, aren't they? Anyhow, they got bigamist ideas."

His tone was bluff and good-natured. Having his say helped him to forget the heat.

I egged him on. "Did you ever know any Mormons?"

"Can't say as I did," he confessed. "But a man don't have to bite into a rotten apple to know what it's like."

"Did you ever know anybody who ever knew a Mormon?"

"Oh, now," he drawled, "you don't catch an old fox like me that way. But I'll tell you what I told those young fellows that came to my place. I told them they were wasting their time.

Strapping fellows like that pushing doorbells! I don't think they got a nibble anywhere in town."

"You would think," I said, "there'd be a better way of getting the message across to the public than going from door to door. But I suppose it does the boys themselves some good, meeting the people, getting to know men like you."

"Yeah," he figured skeptically, "I'd think it'd be darn discouraging."

"They do it on their own, you know, these missionaries who go on house-to-house trips."

"What d'ya mean—their own?"

"Pay their own expenses."

The heavy man looked at me suspiciously. "I s'pose," he said.

"They take a couple of years of their lives," I explained, "and work the field."

He mulled this over. Then he asked, "You right about that?"

"I thought everybody knew that," I said, pretending surprise. "I suppose you don't even know that Mormons don't drink coffee."

Apparently he liked me for taunting him. That took his mind off the heat, too. "You may be selling me a bill of goods," he observed. "Of course, now, I don't mix up in religion much. Religion's worse than politics."

"Most Mormons even refuse to drink tea," I continued.

"That's foolishness."

"And beer and wine and anything alcoholic."

"Well, now," said the heavy man in a suddenly affable tone, "there I agree with them. I haven't touched a drop for fourteen years. Nothing religious, mind you, just plain common sense. The drinking going on these days is a disgrace."

". . . and they don't smoke."

"Well, a good cigar never hurt anybody. But cigarettes can get to be an awful habit, and pipe smoking is hard on the teeth."

During his sermonizing, I had located a pamphlet in my Mormon folder and now handed it to him.

"What's this?" he asked.

"The Mormon Word of Wisdom."

He held it at arm's length and read aloud as if to assure me that his vision was still good even in the fading light, "A Demonstrated Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness." Then he handed it back. "When a man gets to be my age," he said with a sigh that was a heavy burden, "he's pretty set in his ways. I'm sixty-six. Maybe you wouldn't believe it. I'm sixty-six."

Since I had made no motion to take the pamphlet, he looked at it again. Then he put on his glasses. He read slowly, laboriously, his thick lips moving silently as he interested himself in: "The Moderate Use of Meat"; "The Liberal Use of Fruit"; "The Regular Use of Vegetables." When he came to "Abstinence From All Alcoholic Drinks," he commented, "That I agree with. Haven't touched a drop for fourteen years." But it was the statistical data that caused him to contract his brow thoughtfully:

Deaths per 100,000 from the following diseases:

	SIX NATIONS	LDS CHURCH
Tuberculosis	79.5	7.4
Cancer	137.5	48.3
Diseases of the Nervous System	117.6	49.2
Kidney and Kindred Diseases	56.9	29.9

"Huh," observed the heavy man, "that's kinda interesting." Then afraid that his curiosity was running ahead of his intention, he turned the page and gave the remaining paragraphs a cursory going over.

"This," he said with finality, putting his finger on a line, "this I don't believe. 'The Word of Wisdom was promulgated in 1833 by Joseph Smith as a revelation received from the Lord.' " He shook his head and handed the pamphlet back. "Do you?" he asked.

"Do I what?"

"Believe in revelations?" he said wryly.

"Well," I answered, "it all depends. There are lots of things in life I can't explain."

"Yes," he had to confess, "I guess that's right."

For a long while we sat looking out at the darkening street. For a long time the heavy man remained in thought. Then from his labored breathing came his final word: "I still don't think those fellows got a single convert down in Joplin. 'Course, to be honest with you, I don't know."

Perhaps he was wishing that he had let the young men into his home and found out for himself whether I had told him the truth, but he may secretly have been glad that his home town had resisted the Mormon invasion.

In the late 1830's the Saints were driven out of Missouri with bayonets, their homes were burned and their properties destroyed. Their lives were controlled too much by the church, said the Gentiles, and their conduct governed too much by "revelations." Their leader's word was law above the law of the land. Many of the Gentiles held slaves, the Mormons did not. They claimed that slavery was forbidden by the Prophet and the Book. They lived an almost communal life, sheltering their poor through tithes and sacrifices from the rich.

Gentile family life was disrupted whenever one of its members joined the new and hated sect. Local governments were thrown into disorder, churches were split, farmers said the Mormons were out to get control of the land. Fanatical antagonists contended there would be no peace until the Saints were exterminated. This was the beginning of bloodshed in the Mormon story.

One of the first martyrs was a boy of nine, Sardius Smith. He was shot in the face as he gripped the muzzle of a Missourian's gun while his mother pleaded that his life be spared. With the cry, "Kill the young wolves and there will be no old ones," the assassin pulled the trigger. Sardius Smith fell dead and his mother's clothing was splashed with his blood.

At gunpoint the Mormons were forced out of the counties which they had peacefully invaded. They fought back, but the Missourians retaliated by seizing Joseph and Hyrum Smith and locking them in a dungeon in the jail at Liberty in Clay County. Charges against them grew. They were accused of stirring up the people and inciting riot and bloodshed. Out of the whirlwinds of hate came the clamor that they be put to death. Out of a hasty militia court-martial came the penalty: death by hanging.

Before the sentence could be carried out, a new leader crossed the Mormon stage with startling suddenness. He was thirty-seven and he sprang from the ranks of the dispersed and terrorized Saints to hold them together with his iron will. They knew him well. Not long ago he had given his fortune and pledged his life to the Mormon cause. Powerfully built, resolute in carrying out what he believed was the Prophet's design, he now led the homeless and impoverished children of Cumorah eastward to the Mississippi. Whenever they lost faith, this unconquerable apostle had faith to spare. His name was Brigham Young.

Meanwhile in his dungeon cell the Mormon Prophet was waiting the day of execution. Always he said, "It will not come to pass. You cannot take my life until my ministry is fulfilled. That is not yet. But it *is* the will of God that I should not live to see my fortieth year." He was now thirty-two.

Hostile crowds kept their angry, impatient vigil outside the Liberty jail. Word had spread that Mormon forces under Brigham Young were being mobilized to rescue their leader. The state militia had again been alerted. Days passed. The counties of Clay and Davies were overrun with conflicting stories. It was rumored that the executioner had refused to put the Prophet to death though he himself had been threatened with imprisonment. Some said that the judge, in the role of a modern Pilate, had repented of the injustice of a sentence so severe. And others spread the word that the Prophet's escape was being planned by a citizens' group in the town of Liberty.

Weeks went by. Then, when the life of the villages had quieted, the report of an escape from jail sent the enemies of Mormonism back to their guns. There was talk of a miracle. The Saints told it with rejoicing, comparing it to the release of Peter from his cell at Philippi. Free in circumstances that no one seemed able to explain, Joseph and Hyrum Smith returned to the wretched Mormon camps strung out along the west bank of the Mississippi in Iowa and on the eastern shores in Illinois. Brigham Young went forth to meet the Prophet. Humbly and in willing submission he gave the leadership back to Joseph Smith. Had he wished he could have said, "Here are those whom thou hast entrusted to me. Not one has been lost."

That was true. Persecution had only increased the ranks of the Saints and strengthened their faith. Ten thousand ragged but dauntless heirs of the new Israel waited their Prophet's word. They gave him a title, "Seer and Revelator." He led them to a marshy, abandoned village on the Illinois side of the Mississippi where six river shacks stood in brushwood and muddy flats. The land was cheap. The houses were deserted. Standing on the hard crust of a knoll, surrounded by a stagnant swamp, Joseph Smith proclaimed to his people, "It is the will of God that we build our city here."

He spoke and a village began to rise out of Mormon resourcefulness and Mormon zeal. Once the place had been called Venus, then Commerce, but when the first well-constructed red-brick Mormon home was dedicated on June 11, 1839, the Prophet declared, "It is the will of God that we name this place Nauvoo, that is, the Beautiful."

Here in this once sovereign city of Mormondom I met by arrangement my friend Ted Logan. We had not seen each other for a number of years. During this time his letters had kept me informed of his ever-increasing activity in the Mormon cause. I, in turn, had kept him advised of my religious explorations. When he greeted me in the lobby of the Hotel Nauvoo, I knew that he had changed. Almost at once I discovered that he was conscientiously putting Mormon teachings into practice. Not that Ted Logan had become sanctimonious, but he was taking seriously the Word of Wisdom. For one thing he had given up smoking. For another he had given up coffee and tea. But the thing that impressed me most was a new sense of confidence and an evidence of self-respect.

"I've turned things over to the Lord," he told me eagerly.

"Life used to be a struggle, but now it's a game. I never took seriously the words of Scripture. I never took any stock in all the promises they contain. But the moment I accepted them and supported them by living the life, they worked."

Familiar words. I had heard them many times. I had seen them demonstrated. I was meeting them everywhere along the way.

"Everything looks different to me now," Ted was saying. "Remember how I used to envy people? Remember how I wanted this thing and that? How I griped because I messed up my life and had to work in the store when I really had my heart set on law? I used to measure everything in material advantages. Now I see myself as part of a plan that had its beginning long before this existence and that will go on long after this little time of life is past. There's a wonderful saying in the Book of Mormon: 'Men are that they might have joy.' That means joy in everything, and it is really one of the great secrets I have learned in the Mormon faith."

Ted Logan had changed. Somewhere on his Hill Cumorah he, too, had found his magic spectacles.

As we stood together on a promontory near Mulholland Street, I saw a town of some thousand inhabitants with a Roman Catholic Church dominating a sprawling fertile valley. But Ted was seeing a city of more than twenty thousand with the Saints busily working on a nearly completed million-dollar temple. He was seeing Nauvoo in its golden era during the years from 1839 to 1846.

"Here was the temple site—" he pointed it out as we walked to an old well near the edge of the business district—"and the limestone blocks out of which the temple was constructed were cut by hand. There, you can see some of the blocks in the walls of that old school. In the days of the real Nauvoo they were here, one on top of the other, rising to a height of sixty feet and nearly two hundred feet to the dome of the tower, a dome that was covered over with gold leaf. There were thirty hand-hewn pilasters. The cost was over a million dollars and it was greater than any building in the whole Midwest."

We drove through the streets below the hill where old homes mingle with modern buildings, and for Ted the charm of an earlier day was always coming through.

"In the days of Joseph Smith," he said, "Nauvoo was the largest city in Illinois, bigger than Chicago. The houses were of red brick, New England style, like those you see down there on the flats. Each house was surrounded by a garden. Here was the road leading down to the dock where the old paddle-wheelers brought Mormon converts and immigrants by the thousands."

Everywhere Ted found telltale signs of the perseverance of the Saints and evidences of their vision and character. Possessively he stood before Old Homestead, the half-log, half-frame dwelling on the bank of the Mississippi. "Here the Prophet and his wife Emma lived." Reverently we walked through the restored Mansion House. "Here the Smith family lived later on. They had two sons."

He showed me the restored Nauvoo House which had served as a hostelry and took me to the site where the large printing establishment had stood. When I called his attention to points of present interest such as the Catholic school and academy and the large convent of the Benedictine Sisters, his mind was always back a hundred years.

"The Mormons had started a municipal university," he explained, "the first one in the Midwest."

I inquired about a group known as the Icarians who lived in Nauvoo after Mormon times and who had tried a communal experiment.

Ted answered by saying, "The only thing the Icarians did was to start the wine industry. The Mormons had a co-operative plan long before the Icarians ever came. They saw to it that there were no rich and no poor. The days began and ended with prayers and singing. Everybody worked for the common good, everybody tithed, everybody had plenty of work and plenty of leisure."

"I suppose you wish you had lived here in those days," I suggested.

"Maybe," he replied. "But I didn't. So I live the principles of the church today."

"But if everything was so perfect," I challenged, "why didn't it last? Why are the houses only museum pieces and why is Nauvoo just another broken altar along the Mormon trail?"

"Prejudice and hate!" he answered decisively. "From within by traitors who wanted to see Joseph Smith's downfall. From without by non-Mormons who were jealous of him."

"As simple as that?" I asked.

"No, it wasn't simple. The bad Mormons and the non-Mormons got together in their criticism of the Prophet and his tactics."

"On what grounds?"

"His claim to revelations. His idea of the union of church and state or church and city. His progressive program."

"His ideas on polygamy?"

"That, too," Ted agreed.

"How about that?" I asked. "Do you really believe that Joseph Smith had a revelation about plural marriage?"

"I do," said Ted promptly. "But it was misunderstood. It was bound to be. Men who were immoral immediately interpreted it in immoral terms. And, after all, throughout the whole church only about three per cent of the men ever practiced polygamy. I think the Prophet even foresaw that polygamy was necessary for the church."

"Did Joseph Smith himself practice polygamy?"

"We know that he taught and advocated it. We also know that he was criticized for it. But don't you suppose people in Old Testament times criticized Abraham and others who had more than one wife?"

"Well, Joseph wasn't living in Old Testament times," I cautioned. "He was living in America in the nineteenth century."

"That's right, and his thinking was far ahead of his day," Ted said with pride. "He was even planning to run for President."

"Which wasn't such a good idea."

"Why not?" Ted shot back at me. "He surely had the qualifications. And he certainly lived close to God. But there are always some who will not accept the teachings of a new morality. That's what the Mormon faith is. You look at the teachings and you'll have to admit it. Why don't you look at them? They've got everything—tradition, miracles, a moral code, a new Scripture, the plan of salvation. Look at the church and you'll find that it's unselfish, honest, Christian, co-operative. Its record is the most amazing of any group in the country. How did it get that way? God speaking through a man, and people believing it and living the life."

"But," I argued, "had he been a true Prophet, God would have helped him and saved Nauvoo. God didn't. Why?"

"For the answer to that," Ted said, "we'd have to go back to another Prophet. But I don't think we'd find the answer even though we went all the way to Galilee."

We didn't go to Galilee. We went to Carthage, Illinois, to a spot which meant as much to Ted Logan as Galilean scenes. Here a yellowing two-story building of quarried limestone stood in the northwest part of town. The patriarchal, white-haired caretaker, whom Ted introduced to me as Elder McRae, courteously took us into a somber hallway and up a steep flight of creaking wooden stairs. With quiet intensity Elder McRae spoke of the Mormon faith. He admitted us into a medium-sized rectangular room which the narrow second-story window left dark with dusk. Aging gray walls, massive and thick, bore down upon this empty interior. The air was heavy and damp.

The departing footsteps of the custodian faded out on the stairs and somewhere below us a door closed with a thud. We were where Ted wanted to be, in old Carthage jail. To him this room was one of the truly great settings in the Mormon drama. It was a focal point in his adopted faith. He knew its history and its romance. To him historic Carthage jail was an American Calvary.

My attention was drawn to a faded reddish stain protected by a slab of glass on one of the wide, worn floorboards.

"Blood," Ted explained.

". . . of the the Prophet?"

"Probably of his brother Hyrum" was the reply. "Hyrum was killed here. Three men were imprisoned with the Prophet in this room: Hyrum, John Taylor and Willard Richards. Taylor was wounded. Richards escaped without being hurt."

Ted walked to the window in the east wall. "The Prophet was able to get out here. Badly wounded, he jumped and died in the yard below. His last words were 'O Lord, my God.'"

Ted stood looking down while he recounted the story simply and sincerely. "During the rioting and uprising in Nauvoo, Governor Ford had asked Joseph Smith and several other Mormon leaders to come to Carthage pending the settlement of disturbances. He promised them complete protection. The first night they stayed at a hotel, the second night here. The governor said they would have a guard. He appointed one all right, a gang of men who just a short time before had plotted against the Prophet's life. Now they had him trapped. On that second evening, June 27, 1844, these men were joined outside this door by other anti-Mormons. Some had painted their faces so they wouldn't be recognized. They started shooting. Look, you can see the bullet holes in the door. You can see the panel where they shot away the lock. Then they broke into the room."

If for a moment Ted was reliving the experiences of Joseph Smith during his last moments on earth, I was probably Willard Richards, the unharmed member of the imprisoned party. I was a spectator asking the mob about their charges against the Prophet of Nauvoo. The only answer I got was a well-known charge: "He stirreth up the people."

I walked to the window while Ted recreated century-old scenes: the mob with painted faces, shocked into silence by the sight of the dead man, wondering why they had hated him so much, remembering how often he had been beaten and cursed and tarred and feathered; seeing him now in death and not at all sure what kind of a Prophet he had been.

Ted was saying, "One of the mob threw away his gun and cried, 'We have killed a man of God!' Another wiped the muzzle of his gun and said, 'We're rid of him. That means we're rid of the whole Mormon pack.' Armed guards sought to restore order. People of Carthage rushed to the scene of the killing. An old man who had followed the Prophet from Nauvoo raised his hands crying hysterically, 'He was a child of God! He told us clearly, "I am going like a lamb to the slaughter. I shall die innocent and it shall be said of me that I was murdered in cold blood!" ' "

Ted's voice continued the narration. "A man named Ebenezer Rand, a farmer, came like an Arimathean of old. He had an oxcart and said that he would take the bodies to Nauvoo. The dead men were loaded into the cart and covered with blankets."

In thought I walked with Ebenezer Rand beside the plodding animals. I heard the voices of the people fade into the dull rumble of the heavy wheels. Thoughtfully the crowd followed the makeshift hearse. Dust drifted overhead like a cloud following the Seer and Revelator, but in the cloud there was no vision and no voice.

"From this jail," Ted was saying, "a man looks back over the Mormons' path of persecution and forward across the long trail that led them to their promised land."

Ted was determined to lead me to it, too; not geographically, but spiritually to the place where the teachings of the church had taken him. It was here at Carthage that Ted Logan tried earnestly to convert me to the Mormon faith.

"When a man has found something good, he should share it with his friends" was his opinion.

He had shared it with me before, but, no doubt, he felt that since I had gone all the way from Sharon, Vermont, to Carthage, I ought to be ready for his kind of traveling.

"You know what the Mormon religion is?" he asked earnestly. "It's Christianity *plus*. It takes the basic teaching such as the redemptive work of Christ and adds to it the obligation on the part of every man to help in that redemption. It takes the idea of the future life and adds to it a belief in pre-existence. It accepts the ideas of the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ and adds to them the belief that Christ will return and set up His kingdom here on the American continent. It takes the theory of an unchanging God and substitutes for it the truth that God is progressive. Yes, it's Christianity plus, and when you realize it you realize also what you have missed in the usual run of denominationalism."

Defensively I said, "I'm afraid that I can never make the intellectual hurdle necessary to accept some of your doctrines."

"What bothers you?"

"The progressiveness of God, for example. You used to quote a Mormon saying, 'As man is, God once was, and as God is, man too may become.' "

"Catch phrases you always remember!"

"Well, it is a Mormon belief, isn't it?"

"Yes," he agreed, "if you interpret it in the right way. My Protestantism used to be vague about what happens after death. Mormon teaching is clear. The soul of man continues to evolve and progress. If that is true, then it is equally true that God Himself progresses."

"So God always stays a jump ahead?"

"You can put it that way," Ted answered seriously. "And why not? Does the boy ever catch up with his parent? Does one day ever catch up with the next? Everything is progressive, and that's the way it is with God and man."

"And that," I contended, "is what I mean by an intellectual hurdle."

"Oh, well," Ted said with complete assurance, "anyone who is really seeking is going to end up in the Mormon Church." To which he added with conviction, "Especially you."

I called this his Mormon mellowing process. I had observed it in many members of the faith. Instinctively building up confidence in themselves, they softened the resistance of their prospective converts. Perhaps this was nothing plotted or planned; it was very likely the natural consequence of their missionary zeal. Like the importunate widow who in the parable broke down the opposition of the judge, so Ted was taking every opportunity to break down mine. He had come to terms with himself and now had convictions to live by. It was, therefore, a matter of religious patriotism for him to bring me into the union of believers in this American faith.

So he talked with unquestioning confidence about the principles in which Mormons believe and which Protestants refuse to accept. The doctrine of celestial marriage was a case in point. To me, this teaching was a purely speculative theory about the relationship of the sexes in the life to come. To Ted, it was a moral concept, the result of divine revelation. Marriage, he claimed, had been sanctioned by Jesus; celestial marriage by Joseph Smith.

"If and when I get married," he confided, "I want it to be a temple marriage. The vows my wife and I take will unite us for time and eternity."

"How do you know?"

"Because it has been revealed."

"For the sake of the record, let's suppose you'd get a divorce and marry again——"

"Divorces in temple marriages? That's out of the question."

"Well, what about men who had more than one wife? Men like Brigham Young who had——"

"Nineteen."

"What about him?"

"He would live with them in the same circumstances that he did here."

"And if a man's wife dies and he marries again, then does he have two wives in the next world?"

"Life goes on," Ted replied in a voice that made it clear that God would know how to take care of all such eventualities. "The relationships begun in this world naturally continue in the world to come. Death is really just another birth. We are already living in eternity now just as we lived in eternity before we were put on this earth. Take the case of a man who commits suicide. He thinks he is escaping from certain conditions or situations but he isn't. He'll find that he has the same problems and thoughts in the next life that he had here. Only his sense of values will be different and he will have to readjust his thinking."

There was never any breaking through Ted's line of defense. Never belligerent but certainly stubborn, he held to his position supported by the unconquerable forces that had proved themselves so decisively in the rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Neither my reasoning nor subterfuge could dislodge him from doctrines which to me were loaded with a thousand "ifs."

There was the hard-to-comprehend Mormon belief in baptism for the dead. Here was an elaborate and complex system in which temple workers were immersed vicariously for people who had died outside the Mormon faith. This rite was conducted in magnificent temples, million-dollar temples in Utah at Salt Lake City, Logan, St. George and Manti; in Arizona at Mesa; in Idaho at Idaho Falls; in Hawaii at Laie; and in Canada at Cardston, Alberta.

"Baptism for the dead," I murmured. "Do you think it would do my great-grandmother any good to be baptized by proxy?"

"Of course I do."

"How?"

"Because a requirement of the church would be fulfilled, a divine requirement instituted by revelation."

"I can't imagine God going in for that kind of bookkeeping."

"That," he replied pointedly, "is because you don't believe that you will really meet your loved ones in the life hereafter. You may say you believe it, but I know how I felt about these things when I was still a Protestant. You do believe that a record of our lives is kept somewhere, don't you?"

"I think that is all locked up within ourselves, in our subconscious mind or in our soul or in neural patterns in our brain or some such place. Whatever the Bible says about a book of life is all symbolic."

"I don't think so," Ted averred. "That was a Protestant fault with me, too. I hesitated to take the Bible literally. I thought that the 'hands of God,' the 'eye of God,' 'God passing by,' were just figures of speech. They aren't. They are true. Wasn't man made in the image of God?"

"But doesn't that mean only a spiritual image?" I asked.

"No," Ted answered confidently, "it also means a physical likeness. The Bible was not written to confuse people. It means literally just what it says. Of course there is a spiritual meaning in everything, if that's what you mean by *symbolic*. But we are physical and we must perform physical acts. That's the way it is with baptism for the dead. A temple worker goes down into the water of the baptistry and by this act becomes a proxy for the person for whom baptism is being administered. When he does so, somewhere in the life beyond that person has the privilege to accept or to reject the baptism. If he accepts it, he is drawn into the circle of the church of the restoration. If he rejects it, then he stays outside the chosen group and does not share in the real glory."

"How far," I asked, "does the church intend to go in this ritual? Does it expect to baptize someone for each of the early Americans and the early Protestants and even farther back than that?"

"As far back as Adam!" Ted exclaimed. "That is part of the great Mormon commission. I intend to have baptism made for my ancestors as far back as I can. So does every active Mormon. The church has the most complete and efficient genealogical system in the world. It has on file nearly ten million names already. Missionaries work on these genealogies wherever they go. Everyone helps. Everyone *should* help to bring together into one family all who have ever lived, and all who are yet to be born—for the number of those who are to be born is predetermined. Their souls already exist in the realms of God. Isn't it a wonderful thought? We come from God and we return to God to be like Him. I expect someday to sit down with those I have known in a pre-existence and in this existence. I expect to talk with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young and all the other prophets. And I fully expect to talk with God."

What was I to say in the light of such conviction? Who could break through such unyielding indoctrination?

"And remember," Ted warned, "baptism for the dead is Scriptural. Paul mentions it in First Corinthians, 15:29, 'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?' If a person is to believe in the gospel, why not believe in all of it?"

The "whole gospel" was more than just a phrase with the followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a divine command. That is why they held to dogmas which were considered completely anachronistic and untenable by orthodox believers. That is why they were content to keep their requirements for membership difficult for acceptance and unpopular with those who had traditional Christianity as their heritage. But to those who could accept them, to those who could make the necessary hurdles with a conclusive "I believe," to them seemed to come a reward of genuine peace. There was only one answer. The old man whom I had met in the Palmyra grove had the right idea, "Religion is a matter of belief." By the magic of believing Mormons were conquering the field while I still wrestled with reason.

Then came a day when I was to go ahead of Ted Logan in my Mormon adventure; far ahead of him—geographically. He stayed with his books—the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the *Pearl of Great Price,* the *Doctrine and Covenants*—while I went back to Nauvoo to follow the Mormon trek to the Mormon land of promise near the Great Salt Lake. A century ago the first of a band of 143 men, 3 women and 2 boys, under the leadership of Brigham Young, reached that region on July 22, 1847. Now, as a commemoration of the most spectacular pilgrimage in American history, the same number of sojourners, all descendants of Mormon pioneers, were ready to make the trip once more, in seventy-two covered wagons, the original number. Only this time the wagons were shining cars with covered canvas tops. The first wagons had been drawn by oxen; these modern vehicles had oxen, too, but they were plywood cutouts bolted to a rigging on the front fenders.

By special permission I joined the trekkers on the morning of July 15, 1947, as they prepared to leave Nauvoo. The group was dressed in period costumes. Bearded men played the role of the early leaders; the women represented the wives of three men: Brigham Young, Lorenzo Young and H. C. Kimball. The canvas-topped cars were drawn around in a semicircle in Nauvoo Square as the sun rose over the hallowed ground.

I wondered whether the spirits of the Mormon dead were hovering over those 20th-century "covered wagons." I wondered whether they were holding a mystical council above the scene: Joseph Smith and Hyrum, the early witnesses to the Book, the martyrs and the other faithful ones, the children who, like Sardius Smith, had died; and whether Moroni and his father Mormon were also somewhere near. Most of all I wondered about the man on whom the mantle of the Prophet had fallen, the controversial, many-sided figure who was fated to lead the children of a native Israel over fourteen hundred miles of mountain and desert and unexplored frontier. Was the spirit of Brigham Young walking in this encampment and moving among the men as they lined up for breakfast before the flames of an open fire?

Movie cameras bore down on the scene from panel trucks. Loud-speakers told the story to a crowd of silent spectators. "This caravan will follow the original Mormon trail insofar as that is possible. It will arrive at Salt Lake on the very day, July

22, when the first noble pilgrims entered the Salt Lake Valley exactly one hundred years ago."

Bystanders saw in all of this a dramatic extravaganza, good publicity for the Latter-day Saints Church, human interest copy for feature writers. The unmarked trail which had kept the original vanguard on a continual hazardous march for one hundred and twenty days could now be crossed comfortably on marked highways in less than a week. A P-80 could cover the same distance in air-line miles in one hundred and twenty minutes. There would be Chamber of Commerce welcomes along the route. Dramatizations would be staged every night. Mayors of towns which had once driven out the hated Smithites would hand to the Sons of the Utah Pioneers the key to their cities. Bands would meet us playing Mormon songs, and where the Mormon dead lay buried in nameless graves, markers would be set up to show that as far as local feeling was concerned, all had been forgiven. To the nation it was a pageant on wheels.

However, when I met the man in charge of the caravan, I knew that, for him at least, there was a deeper motive behind this pilgrimage. To Wendell J. Ashton it seemed right that the project should have one main objective: a deepening of faith by uniting the sacrifices of the past with the blessings Mormon people now enjoy. To reproduce as faithfully as possible the original exodus from Nauvoo, the trekkers had been organized on the plan of the original pioneers with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties and captains of tens.

So far it was a graphic portrayal and our seventy-two-car caravan bore some resemblance to the covered wagons of old as we circled the sacred grounds. There the similarity ended. When the first Mormons fled from Nauvoo during the winter of

1845-1846, their suffering was intense. They carried their belongings to the river flats. Man power ferried the ox teams and wagons across the Mississippi on crudely fashioned rafts. For two days the rafts shuttled back and forth bringing their cargoes of the homeless and displaced. Two days and then the river froze thick and solid. Thus had God come to the Mormons' aid. It was this same God whom the trekkers recognized in the reenactment of the Mormon saga. When things went well, it was always God who got the credit. When things went wrong, it was always a test of faith. That was Mormon belief. That was Mormon philosophy.

Brigham Young was like that. His moods changed with the change of the Divine Countenance. When he beheld the river frozen over as if by a miracle, he commanded the people to fall to their knees and give God the praise. They sang and prayed and rejoiced though Nauvoo, the beautiful, was being abandoned and though their temple stood bare and lonely on its highest hill.

"Where to, Brother Young?" they asked. "Where shall we go?"

The man of iron and invincible trust in heaven and in himself replied, "Where God shall lead."

We crossed the Mississippi on the Keokuk bridge and were met by a welcoming committee. Our Illinois police escort turned their duties over to an Iowa highway patrol. Our caravan paraded through Main Street. Cameramen caught the covered wagons with their spotless white tops and with the cutout oxen looking real. The captains had cowbells on their cars. Drivers waved their Western hats to the welcoming throngs. The Mormon trek, modern version, had begun.

For me it meant the completion of a tour that had started at Sharon, Vermont, long ago. It was still geographic, but I was sure it would lead me deeper into the religion and life of those who, like Ted Logan, believed they were following trails of absolute truth.

For seven days the camouflaged covered wagons retraced the route of the pioneers. For seven days I traveled with them, drawing ever nearer to the Mormon empire, getting ever closer to the heart of the Mormon people. In every experience *faith* was the word that helped me understand what had sustained the first Mormons.

The fourteen hundred miles on which I accompanied these "modern pioneers" convinced me that Brigham Young wrote his own eleventh chapter of Hebrews. By faith he accepted the leadership of the church when the pilgrims were encamped at Winter Quarters near what is now Omaha, Nebraska. By faith he left the promising and friendly prairies to set his heart toward a country which he had never seen. By faith he crossed the ranges of Wyoming and pressed onward into the forbidding mountains to a distant horizon foreseen by the Prophet, Seer and Revelator. He trusted more in the "guidance of the Everlasting God" which urged him on than he did in the counsel of trappers and frontiersmen who tried to dissuade him. The Prophet himself had called Brigham Young "the Lion of the Lord."

Faith was written everywhere along the trail. I felt it in the morning prayers and in the evening services of the Sons of the Utah Pioneers. They made it clear in their dramatizations and in their historic references that Brigham Young's company was merely the advance guard, the spies who had gone to scout out Canaanland.

The real triumph, the colossal achievement, lay in the nearly eighty thousand religious nomads who trusted Brigham Young as much as any had ever trusted Joseph Smith. These converts, the fruit of missionary labors, came from Europe and England at the rate of nearly two thousand a year between 1848 and 1856. The church had set up a perpetual emigration fund. The church brought them as far as Coralville, Iowa, the handcart center of Mormonism. Here a believer's faith was put to the ultimate test. Here he could procure a wooden handcart with iron wheels some five feet in diameter. Hickory shafts served as handles and the six-foot-wide box was made as light and durable as possible.

If the convert still wished to follow the promise of the Prophet and trust the vision of President Young, he could push or pull this torturous conveyance fourteen hundred miles to a valley beyond the Rocky Mountains. Thousands chose to do so. Westward on the road to the place of promise they set up Mormon camps and called them Camps of Israel. With pioneer resourcefulness, one group planted, another cultivated and a third harvested the meager crops. Ever they kept moving on. Six thousand died along the way.

Orson Pratt, who kept a diary at the time, tried to describe the scene:

> The spring rains have come. They pour down in torrents. With great exertion a part of the camp is enabled to get six miles, while other wagons stick fast in the deep mud. We are obliged to cut brush and limbs and throw them in our tents to keep our beds from sinking in the mud. Our food is the bark of trees.

They fought the weather in every season, battled hostile Indians in every territory and conquered fear of defeat in every company. Sometimes they were saved by ready wit and by the valiant spirit of a George A. Smith who said, "If there is no God in Israel we are a poor sucked-in set of fellows. But I am going forward with my family and the Lord will open the way!"

Sometimes there was the remedy of a good song:

Our faith is with the handcarts,
They have our hearts' best love;
'Tis a novel mode of traveling,
Devised by the God above.

Hurrah for the camp of Israel,
Hurrah for the handcart scheme!
Hurrah! Hurrah! 'tis better far
Than the wagon and ox-team!

Always it was faith. For years the wagons and handcarts came resolutely into the wayside camps with half-frozen children and half-starved children or happy children, depending on the weather and God's munificence. For years the pioneers kept pushing toward the setting sun, drawn by the spell of a slogan that was characteristically American: freedom to worship and freedom to work. Death and burial, birth and pain, tragedy and terror could not hold them back.

Always it was faith. The Sons of the Utah Pioneers paused at more than fifty sacred spots along their centennial trek. The "covered wagons" were drawn up respectfully, the caravan leaders conducted a service and prayed, and once more the stories of the Mormon past were told:

> Here at Winter Quarters in the fall of 1846 nearly a thousand homes were built by the Saints. Some were of dirt, some of logs. Chimneys were made of sod cut in the form of bricks. Some

roofs were covered with mud. The snows were heavy and the winds were cold. Sickness yielded to death. About three hundred Mormon refugees died here that first winter.

Here at Independence Rock, Wyoming, Wilford Woodruff climbed the highest point on the north end of the rock and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God. As he stood there, he noticed the Missourians burying a woman. He learned she was the third of her family to die on the trail.

This is Martin's Hollow, Wyoming. Early snows overtook the group numbering 575 persons with 146 handcarts. There was no shelter. Wolves howled with the frigid winds. Pilgrims perished. Corpses were buried in the snowdrifts, because the survivors were too weak to scoop out shallow graves in the frozen ground. Word reached Brigham Young and he sent out relief wagons. They reached the group here and found that fifty-six of the travelers had died. Among the survivors was Nellie Pucell about ten years old. Her parents had died on the journey. Her limbs were frozen and with crude instruments both her legs were amputated near the knees, and for the rest of her days Nellie Pucell waddled about on her stubs. Yet she was married and brought six fine children into the world.

We are gathered at Rock Creek! This is the scene of the tragedy of the James G. Willie handcart company, overtaken by early snows. It lost sixty-six of its some five hundred emigrants. We stand where they are buried in a common grave.

Then came the day when we touched the Utah border thirty miles west of old Fort Bridger. It was here that the men of the early Mormon vanguard were told that they could never cross the mountains. Or, if they could, they would find only desert wastes, a dead sea and death.

Brigham Young said, "We will go forward." Coyote Creek, Echo Canyon, Henefer, Big Mountain. . . . For sixteen agonizing days the pioneers struggled across the remaining ninety miles, then, finally on July 21, 1847, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow entered the valley.

Here they waited for Brigham Young, who had been kept behind by an attack of mountain fever. He came three days later in Wilford Woodruff's wagon and was greeted by the question, "Have we come all this way out of the bondage of our oppressors only to find ourselves caught in the slavery of the desert?"

Brigham Young said, "This is the place."

Through Emigration Canyon rolled our luxurious caravan to the exultant shouts of thousands of welcomers. The wagon tops had been swept clean for this homecoming, the oxen had been scrubbed, batteries of cameras were set on every knoll, bands were playing and flags and banners flying.

The venerable president of the church, George Albert Smith, and Utah's governor, Herbert B. Maw, now joined the procession. Police held back the crowds. Police escorts led the way with sirens shrieking. In the distance the spires of the great temple rose over the mountain-rimmed miracle city, Salt Lake; around it the promised valley lay like the garden of God under a cloudless sky.

A solemn hush moved through the throng of fifty thousand when we stopped in front of a gigantic statue ready for its unveiling. In a series of impressive ceremonies the panels at the base of the $300,000 "THIS IS THE PLACE" monument were dedicated. Surmounting the central shaft were the figures of Wilford Woodruff, Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young. This was the monument of which a Catholic prelate said, "You will note that here in the wings of this monument representatives of all religions are united. There they will remain for all time to come. Is it too much to hope that the physical unity in this monument may become a symbol of a spiritual unity in our lives?"

It did seem as if the world and representatives of all faiths had come to the Mormon industrial empire to welcome the trekkers. A five-mile-long parade and a speech by President Smith transformed Salt Lake City into a religious festival. There were concerts in the acoustically perfect Mormon tabernacle, pageants and plays and parties. A cycle of Gentile distrust and suspicion had ended, and there was being ushered in an era of thoughtful consideration of what this church of the once disinherited had to offer.

What did it have to offer me? Now that I stood in the holy city, how close was I to the fulfillment of Ted Logan's prediction? Out of my close association with the travelers along the trail had come a number of thought-provoking impressions. That the men lived by the *Word of Wisdom* was commendatory but not spectacular. They took it as a matter of course that hot chocolate was as good as coffee and cocoa as tasty as tea. It was probably the only modern caravan that ever crossed half a continent without lighting a cigarette. The church code had taught them how to get along without cursing, and tempers were kept in check even when the going was difficult. As a "hitchhiker" and critical observer, I reached Salt Lake City with the opinion that, to the true Mormon, a religion is no religion unless it is lived, and faith is not faith unless it covers all vicissitudes. Their lives bore testimony to their creeds. I had gone on the trek to learn about Mormon history, but I found that it was Mormon life which was written in the trail from Nauvoo to Utah, a state where three fifths of the population belongs to the Latter-day

Saints organization. In a hundred years this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had taken its place importantly among the major and influential denominations of our nation and the world.

That I had come to these realizations pleased my convert friend when next I saw him. Ted Logan was glad that Salt Lake City had taught me some salient features about Mormondom: the church represents the greatest religious co-operative in the world; operates more industries than any other spiritual organization; has an efficient relief society, promotes a model welfare plan, rightly boasts a record for tithing that remains unsurpassed by any major denomination anywhere; has given Utah more students registered in high schools and universities than any other denomination in any other state in ratio to population; has the highest moral code of any denomination of its size; claims to be the most democratic church in its administration and spiritual policies. Patterned closely after the apostolic tradition, the church consists of a President, the Council of Twelve Apostles, Patriarch to the Church, Assistants to the Council of the Twelve, the First Council of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric. This highly supervised organization includes the local parish or ward, the stake of Zion, composed of a number of wards, and the mission, which generally consists of a group of states.

Ted was gratified that I had learned these general details, but he was rather disinterested in the fanfare that had attended the end of the trek.

"Did you look into the merits of the priesthood?" Ted wanted to know.

"I was in a Mormon temple," I parried.

"You couldn't have been. No non-Mormon is permitted to go inside. Only Mormons in good standing are allowed to enter."

"Nevertheless, I *was* in a Mormon temple," I insisted. "I was shown through the one at Idaho Falls."

"Oh, I see," he agreed. "That was before its dedication. Yes, then you would have been permitted to go in. What did you find?"

"Rooms," I said. "Some reminded me of a Masonic lodge, others were like lovely chapels. Murals on the walls depicted scenes of the Creation, the Flood, the Millennium and so on. I understand these are used for initiatory and dedicatory ceremonies."

"Temple ordinances," Ted explained, "such as marriage for eternity and bestowal of endowments."

"The entire lower floor was given over to dressing rooms for the temple workers. I was shown the huge baptistry set on twelve bronze oxen. Above the baptistry were places for the officials who keep the records as the workers are baptized for the dead."

"Aren't you ready now to begin studying the eternal truths," Ted asked, "instead of observing Mormon externalities?"

"It's a long road," I had to say.

He nodded in agreement. "Longer than the trek, but it's worth it. It endows a man with the priesthood, the only valid priesthood on earth. Other priests and ministers treat religion as a business. Take their salaries away from them and see how many will stay in the profession! In the Mormon faith the priesthood is not a profession; it is a sacred trust. No one is paid. Actually we have no ministers in the strictest sense. Men are ordained by priestly powers handed down through spiritual visitations. In 1829 Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were praying together and John the Baptist appeared to them——"

"The intellectual hurdle," I interrupted.

"The hurdle of faith," Ted corrected and continued with as much conviction as if he were reciting Scripture. To him it *was* Scripture and he said, "John the Baptist laid his hands on the two men and conferred on them the authority of what we call the Aaronic priesthood."

"But what does it mean?" I implored.

"It means that a link with the past has been re-established."

"All the way back to Aaron?"

"The spokesman for Moses," said Ted with complete assurrance. "Someday it may be possible for us to trace someone's ancestry back to Aaron, but until that time we are the spiritual inheritors of Aaron's priesthood. And there is a higher priesthood than this. You see, later in 1829 Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery were visited again. This time by Peter, James and John."

"Ted," I interrupted desperately, "it's unnecessary for me to ask whether you believe these things. You do. But how did you come to believe them? How do you think I can ever be convinced that they are true?"

"By the inner witness" was the prompt reply. "You come to feel it and to feel it is to know it is true. Peter, James and John *did* appear to these men and they were given the keys of heaven and earth."

"Which means?"

"The complete unveiling and knowledge of the life of men and the truths of God. We call this the Melchizedek priesthood because it was conferred after the manner in which the high priest of Salem conferred the order on Abraham. Jesus was that kind of high priest, and true Mormons after the age of nineteen also may be priests of that order, actually officiating in the name of Christ as His representative."

"And you," I asked, "are you working your way up through these stages? Is that the idea?"

"My present plan," he said smiling, "is to go on a mission. Even though I haven't yet converted you."

"You mean, two years of your life? Give up your job? Take care of your own expenses?"

"Why, yes," he said, "I guess that's the usual arrangement."

His words took me back to the Hill Cumorah. I was standing again with a young man to whom I had just made the great "exposé" of the Book of Mormon. I was sitting once more with a gentleman on a hotel veranda and hearing him say, "Two of those fellows stopped down at my place once." I was passing solemnly across the scenes where markers had been set "in memory of those who followed the Prophet's vision and the leadership of Brigham Young." I was standing with fifty thousand people before a monument on which were inscribed four simple words: "THIS IS THE PLACE."

I did not know what most Mormons considered the heart of their faith; perhaps they, too, would say it was the priesthood, but to Ted Logan it was more than that. Mormonism had made his life a game—a game of faith, glorious and compelling. It had overtaken and absorbed his life. Heaven was as real to him as his grocery-store counter. Something of the essence of God was hidden somewhere in those he served. His little black tithing book, his daily meditations, his moral code, his Mormon literature were the treasures of great worth which he had dug up, his plates of gold. There was no other motive behind his call to go on a mission than his wanting to share these treasures with others.

"And where do you plan to go?" I asked.

"Wherever they send me," he replied. Speculatively he looked at me. "And if the territory includes your home——"

"Come and see me!" I invited.

"I will," he promised. "Maybe by that time it will do some good."

To which I had no reply. But I was thinking about the power of the Mormon Church in enlisting the loyalties and potentials of Ted Logan and two hundred thousand others like him. To me a mission was unspeakable sacrifice; to them, a privilege.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMETHING TO LIVE BY

My excursions into the religious adventuring of my friends taught me many things. While I was sure that I would never become a Trappist, there was something in the monastic principle that helped me in my own search for something to live by. The Trappist alerted me to the fact that we are living in an age of materialistic madness. He reminded me that a substantial part of the religious process should be devoted to the development of a philosophy which would put materialism in its proper perspective. And there was something else. His daily rising at the eerie hour of two o'clock was his admonition that everyone ought to start the day with a thought of God. His visit to the altar eight times a day was an invitation for men to mingle worship with work. The vows he took argued for the need for self-discipline in all of life's experiences.

As for the Hutterite, I was sure that John Maendel realized that I would never join the commune. I could not imagine myself in a full beard and a hook-and-eye jacket. I was not an advocate of their kind of security or their type of freedom. Their regimentation and discipline were not for me. But the Hutterite gave me a most convincing argument that the secularization of society is a genuine threat to our culture and our time. What ministers have preached about and what philosophers have warned against, what writers have called the "decay of our culture," the lowly communal member made graphic by his open warfare against the *Weltgeist.* Churches have been talking for two thousand years about "being in the world and not of it." Very few people took the preachment seriously. Along came the Hutterite living the scriptural life and quite willing to be laughed at for doing it. Along came the Hutterite building his commune on the principle that *things* do not bring happiness and secularization will not win lasting peace of mind.

The outlawed, overzealous Penitente also had something to teach me. Whenever I thought of Carlos Marquez I could hear him say, "There is an hour when every man must crucify the flesh. The whip is the symbol of renunciation far beyond anything we see inside the dark *morada* walls. No real greatness is attained without sacrifice. We rise as we learn the art of subjugating self. You have made your religion easy, painless and convenient. But volitional sacrifice, symbolized by our rites, is the vitality of religion, and when sacrifice is abandoned, religion dies."

The Swedenborgian convinced me that our life increases in value as we relate it to a vision of eternal things. He taught me to interpret the Word of God, as well as the ways of men, in terms of inner meanings. Everything has its divine counterpart; all is held in God's infinite hand. To think only in terms of the physical world is to take a warped and narrow view of man's purpose. To believe in the Son of God is to live according to His teachings. "If a man thinks and speaks pious things while not shunning evil or sin, the pious things are not pious." The New Churchman believed that every person had both a natural and a spiritual mind. The natural mind is for this world, the spiritual for heaven. "In respect to his understanding, man is in both minds, but not in respect to his will," for he has ever before him the choice to love evil or good.

The Vedantist taught me that true religion is the response of one's whole personality to the reality of God. He helped me to redefine Christian beliefs in terms of contemporary life and showed me techniques for the development of Christian practices. He insisted that anything that has been experienced in the past can again be experienced. Any miracle can be reproduced. Any revelation can again be revealed if the circumstances are met and the conditions are properly set up. One of the first principles of his faith is to assure himself that what he believes is intellectually justified. His beliefs are more related to a set of divine laws than to a sect; they represent a point of view rather than a church and are at best a philosophy rather than a religion. He believes that the problem of God is really the problem of finding one's true self. God is the Larger Self embracing all our narrower selves. He is the Life of our life, the Breath of our breath, the Mind of our mind and the Soul of our soul. "We have found God when we have discovered the divineness of our true selves and know ourselves to be one with the Divine Self in others."

From the Mormons I learned that true religion is that faith which has the power to loose the spiritual force lying concealed and latent in the heart of man. I disagreed with those who saw the Mormon in revolt against the institutionalized church. He was, rather, rising impatiently against a world which felt that religion should stay cloistered in its own trivial traditional bounds and limited in its miracles and prophecies to a special, outlived dispensation. This to him was the great illusion, the monstrous fallacy. He refused to think in terms of a restricted "Holy Land" or "Christian Era." To him America was as important as Palestine and his generation as vital in the essentials of faith as were the early apostles. He looked on himself as disciple and priest in his own right. God has no select eras, no limited revelations, no time boundaries, no special fate or destiny. He comes to all men who come to Him. He chooses those who seek Him and blesses those who make themselves worthy of His grace. Faith is the central theme, and trust and loyalty the cardinal tenets.

I never fully understood Mormon theology, but I could not question Mormon consecration. Someone once said, "Don't put any stock in anyone who says he is following Jesus until you see him give up his possessions and, like the disciples, go from town to town without thought of pay, bearing the gospel of the Christ." My Mormon friend showed me a religion that sent him out into the world. For two years he went from door to door with a conviction. It was not my conviction, but it was his, and for him it was true. As long as I could remember, Protestantism had been talking about missions and the need and value of being zealous in advancing the kingdom of God. To me missions had always meant putting a few extra dollars into a special envelope in the hope that somehow somebody somewhere would convert the heathen. My friend gave not only his money; he gave himself. He preached the best sermon on this subject that I ever heard. It was the most convincing and the most believable, and it carried more weight than any letter or plea ever sent out by a church board. He said, "I am taking two years of my life to go on a mission."

One by one my friends assured me that they had found the "pearl of great price." They were through with religious house hunting and rapping at unknown doors and walking dark streets of unbelief and indecision. From the moment in which they found the great Something to live by, they committed their lives to a set of unquestioned principles. They showed me that the best proof of the workability of a faith is in putting the faith to work. Each in his own way had found expression for deep-rooted impulses. I was told that it was much like falling in love.

The attitudes of these friends who had found a new faith showed a remarkable similarity—remarkable because their personalities were all so very different. Now each one spoke of a new sense of integration, an awareness of the inner self, an awakened consciousness of the presence of God. Life's good breaks and bad were tossed into the hopper of their convictions and sifted down until only truth remained. It was truth according to their newly acquired philosophies.

They taught me that the most precious possession a man has is his own experience. The thing that has happened to *him,* his love, his career, his struggle, his dreams, his spiritual quest and his discovery are the real things. They convinced me that all great and lasting faiths began with a personalized religious experience. That is the way Christianity itself began. It began with the Galilean and the recognition of His union with God. This was the point at which the Christian faith was born. And, according to my friends, that is the point at which true religion is born in every man. In some it is a sudden, mystical awareness; in others, a gradual revelation, a kindling of a divine enthusiasm; in still others, a return to parent faith.

There were now no questions which could not be answered within the framework of their own group. There were no doubts that could not be resolved by a study and search of their body of doctrine. God's universe and God's plan had been compressed into the folds of their teachings, and they were now workers together with Him in bringing about the destiny of His plans. They had authority. They spoke as though they were directed by an unseen power, backed not only by conviction but by divine directive.

For me, my convert friends held only pity and a fading hope that I might someday see the light of their truths. I was just one of the apathetic millions whose religion had been handed down by tradition and was being retained by habit. My friends bemoaned the fact that we poor aimless wanderers, we of the neither hot nor cold variety of Christians, we lukewarm dabblers in organized religion, along with the non-churchgoing masses, had never known the thrill of finding the treasure of a burning faith which God has hidden in every life. We were looked on as religiously poor migrants, blind leading the blind. All the while the great adventure was being missed, and for us religion would remain empty ceremonies and clichés, cold loyalty to commitments that we did not truly believe, lip service to symbols that we did not understand.

I agreed with them that it is time for religion to be taken out of ecclesiastical storage, dusted off and critically examined as to its practicality for constructive use in the complex life of modern man. Like millions of other people I am looking for a more vital faith. In an age of insecurity we are out to make our own lives more secure. In an era of uncertainty about world affairs we want to be sure of our own tomorrow. At a time when plans for an enduring peace are still in the making, we are determined to find peace of mind. There is something more than this: a growing realization that the outward world is the result of an inner consciousness, and that the totality of national life is but the expression of the life of the individual. We are living in the kind of world that was in our minds yesterday, and tomorrow's world will be the one we are thinking today. We are beginning to realize that the world of scientific miracles is inadequate for our needs without an equal devotion to the miracle of faith. We feel that it is in our power to bring about this miracle. That it has to begin within ourselves is obvious, for how can we create a better world unless we first become better individuals?

With this in mind I saw very little in these "lesser-known" religious movements which could not be found in traditional Protestantism. There were challenges in our faith which I, at least, had never fully accepted, and there were unpaid bills which I had disregarded. We of the older churches had left undone the most common religious duties and come far short of the most elementary demands. Our churches left it up to us how far we wanted to go in our spiritual adventuring. In Protestantism's liberality a man did not need to become a Trappist if he desired to spend his life in prayer. If he wished to suffer, as did the Penitente, he could do so, provided he did it more or less inconspicuously. He could live in a commune if he thought the Hutterian way was right. The belief in an internal meaning of the Word and the invitation to think in terms of living in two worlds at once according to Swedenborgian doctrine could be tolerated. A man could practice yoga and still be a Protestant in good standing. He could go on a two-year mission, and he would very likely evoke the admiration of many a fellow churchman. He could do all of these things and no one would stop him.

But no one would encourage him, either, and we all need encouragement. If a man really had the impulse and the desire to commit himself fully to any or all of the practices and beliefs undertaken by my six friends, I could understand how his inner spirit would react against the torpor of the traditional church. Protestantism's genius was to let the individual decide how deeply he wished to go in the Christian adventure. He could get by on little or much, just as he could get by with little or much show of patriotism and still be a "good American." In Protestantism's democratic spirit lay both its strength and its weakness.

The case could have rested there. I was prepared to say that there had always been new denominations and there always would be. Even if the "traditional" churches had all the answers, there would still be some people who would look elsewhere for the fulfillment of their spiritual needs. I could see no reason why this should not be so. We drive different cars, live in different homes, have different tastes, select different climates. Why should anyone suppose we could all be happy in the same church?

And why should we think of the other man's religion as a byway running off from Church Street, U.S.A.? Who is to say what God has revealed to a man? How can we judge him or condemn him without knowing this? The other man's faith is always strange until we put ourselves in his place. One thing is certain, beliefs which seem utterly vague and even fantastic to one person come to be accepted by another as the only beliefs worth having.

My friends claimed they had found *truth* and no dogmatic theologian could argue them out of it. No evangelizing enthusiast could entice them away from convictions which they intuitively felt had come to them from a divine source. Theology had taken second place. The enthusiasm that counted was their enthusiasm. Assurance and faith held first place in their new relationship.

My friends and their chosen groups were part of the old scene that is American faith, American freedom and the American right. Varied expressions of religion have always been the strong fibers in the pattern of our democracy, and such a democracy has never been known in countries where freedom of faith is restricted. In the midst of the Kentucky hills, a Trappist monastery. On a mesa in New Mexico, a Penitente *morada*. Along an avenue in a great metropolis, a Vedanta chapel. In the heart of the Midwest, a Swedenborgian church. Within the South Dakota prairies, a Hutterian commune. Above the transformed desert, a Mormon temple.

America had room for all. I was not disturbed by the multiplicity of religions. I was disturbed only by the lack of give-and-take that existed among them. I hoped that my friends would not permit their new-found loyalties to cut them off from other people's way of worship. I hoped they would not isolate themselves, the one from the other, but this was asking too much. A strong, institutionalized religion is automatically committed to the idea that it represents a special channel of divine grace. It has no other alternative. It is compelled to be authoritative and exclusive. This has been the fate of denominations thoughout Christian history.

Here was the question: on what basis could a person establish an authoritative faith and still maintain an appreciation of another person's religious point of view? How could one sincere believer enter into the experiences of another without watering down his own convictions? Was the vaunted ideal of "unity in diversity" attainable?

In search of an answer I reviewed the experiences of my friends once more. As I did so, one inescapable fact kept making itself apparent, one common quality ran through their spiritual discoveries like a golden thread, one personality stood out as the focal point in each of the six groups. The Christ had once more proved Himself to be all things to all men. He who was El Cristo to the Penitente was also the Blessed Savior to the Trappist. To the Swedenborgian He was the Lord, to the Vedantist the Creed and Code of life. He who inspired the Hutterite to undertake communal living commissioned the Mormon to go into all the world and teach all nations. His humanity surpassed that of saint or prophet or seer. His inspiration went beyond holy books and holy phrases. He was more than any single quality. He was above localization in any one group, old or new. Without a doubt, He was the answer to every man's quest and the symbol of unity in every man's relation to his fellowmen.

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